

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MOQUE

**SPOTLIGHT
CAROTIC HORROR**



UNCENSORED INTERVIEWS WITH
**JEAN ROLLIN
LINA ROMAY
JOSÉ LARRAZ
JOE D'AMATO**
PLUS: XXX HORROR

**MARVEL
ZOMBIES**

**JAMES GUNN ON
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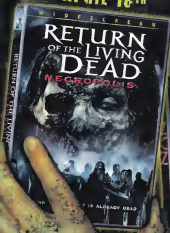
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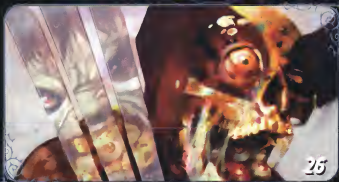
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32



36

SINEMA OF FLESH AND BLOOD

Rue Morgue mounts an exploration of the relationship between horror and pornography with a peek at the perverse pleasures of the Erotic horror movement of the 1970s. Exclusive interviews with filmmakers Jean Rollin, José Larraz and scream queen Lina Romay.

Plus: Joe D'Amato exhumed, contemporary Splatter Porn and more!

by Chris Alexander, Jovanka Vuckovic, Stuart Andrews and Dave Alexander

16 NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND 6
Pornography.

POST-MORTEM 7
Letters from fans, readers and weirdos.

DREADLINES 8
News highlights, horror happenings.

THE CORONER'S 12
Weird stats and morbid facts.

NEEDFUL THINGS 14
Strange trinkets from our bazaar of the bizarre.

CINEMACABRE 38
The latest films, the newest DVDs and reissues.

SCHIZOID CINEPHILE 64
Mad musings from Chris Alexander.

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS 66
The horror comic book goop.

THE NINTH CIRCLE 69
Spotlight: David Wellington's Moxster Island.

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR 74
The Mummies of Ancient Egypt.

THE GORE-MET 76
Menu: Joe D'Amato's Anthropophagus.

AUDIO DROME 79
Spotlight: Rock City Morgue.

PLAY DEAD 82
New and upcoming games.

CLASSIC CUT 86
*Robert Louis Stevenson's
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*

DAWN OF THE DEAD HEROES

The Walking Dead creator Robert Kirkman explains what happened to the classic men in tights after Marvel placed its entire universe in his maniacal hands. Plus: A corpse comics APB and a look back at Deadworld.

by Gary Butler, Jovanka Vuckovic and Sam Costello

26

INVASION OF THE SEX SLUGS FROM OUTER SPACE!

James Gunn gives us the scoop on the goop in his new retro-splatter-comedy Slither.

by Dave Alexander

32

NECRO EROTICA

Exhumed for your viewing pleasure, the beautifully morbid photography of Chad Michael Ward.

by Jovanka Vuckovic

36



38



76



86

Note From Underground



If you Google "pornography" on the internet, you'll find a host of articles pertaining to legal and social issues surrounding porn. Among them there will be articles and analytical essays by all sorts of moral crusaders offering everything from advice on how to cure your porn addiction to it being a cause of rape. And while most of these noble insurgents will concede to the fact that we're all doing it behind the red curtain, after all these years, it's still not acceptable for us to watch it or, god forbid, try to fuse it with art.

The word "pornography" has become synonymous with vulgarity, obscenity and filth. It's also been used to describe lurid or sensational material that might result in violation of cultural mores – a definition that the horror genre has found itself subject to throughout its history. Let's face it, horror has commonly been regarded by the cinematic intelligencia as an artless genre, just one nubile step above *smut*. Both genres fructify embrace the exploration and shattering of taboo, so it's not surprising they found themselves frolicking together in the same stained bed.

In cinema there was always a pretty clear distinction between horror and pornography, but that line began to blur in the 1960s when filmmakers like Doris Wiseman, Herschell Gordon Lewis, Russ Meyer and Harry H. Novak began pushing the boundaries of acceptable onscreen sex and violence. But even these perverse pioneers were no match for the Europeans.

While grandhouses were scandalizing America's youth with exploitation flicks like *Bad Girls Go to Hell* and *Blood Feast*, Europeans were bumping and grinding to a more explicit beat. They've always been more liberal when it comes to sexuality so naturally their films got kinkier quicker. By the mid-1960s, erotic, often-vampy horror movies became conventional overseas as a handful of brave filmmakers like Jean Rollin (*The Rape of the Vampire*), Jess Franco (*Vampyrus Lesbos*) and José Larraz (*Nanquitas*) continued to dispense with moral limitation in favour of aesthetic and, more commonly, indulgence.

To them, sex and horror were bedfellows, and their offspring was a jittery, glittery wave of Euro-erotic (Euro-erotic) horror. As the years progressed, the new fornication became commonplace and there was no way forward but to reach new levels of explicitness. Horror became harder; sex replied in kind.

By the time *Deep Throat* came all over screens in 1972, the European erotic horror film – faced with its own extinction – had to up the ante in the sex department. Our fearless exploitation filmmakers were suddenly forced to appease the growing raincoat crowd by inserting (sometimes detrimental) hardcore sex scenes into their films. Alas, the penis was the fleshy knife that would fatally wound the Euro-erotic horror movement and, by the late '70s, it had all but died a derivative death.

Decades later, these films survive as sexy curios, the dark fantasies of a different time and different place. Out of their filthy affair, an orgy of notorious films emerged, some infamous for their titles alone (*Porno Holocaust*), others, quiet and celebrated gems (*The Grapes of Death*) that still beg for a proper DVD release (as is the case with José Larraz's lyrical and beautiful *Symptoms*).

By contrast to the moody and imaginative flesh horrors of this bygone era, today there exists a small but undeniable sub-subgenre we call *Splinter Porn*, an artless venture that tries to consummate extreme splatter with hardcore pornography. We live in an age where we've seen it all, and gore is no longer able to offend us on its own, so the next logical step for these young American filmmakers is to combine blood and guts with hardcore sex. Try as they might, the mixture has no potency as one element is designed to revile and the other to arouse. It's like the concept of a speedball – heroin and methamphetamine – the two just don't jive.

Horror and sexuality needn't be an adiosyncretas, as some of the classic films discussed throughout this issue illustrate. I also understand that the divide between art and pornography is entirely subjective, but I encourage you to put down your moral compass and give some of these immodest Euro-erotic horror films a chance. They are a treasured peephole into a curious period in which horror and pornography enjoyed a brief relationship that was both shameless and artistic.

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COVER: LIVING DEAD GIRL

DESIGNED BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

RE: RM#54 It was great to read *Raw Morgue's* opinions on the remake trend. It's an annoying movement, yes, but I'm sick of hearing horror fans bitch about remakes all the time. It's good to see that years of being horror experts hasn't turned you all into complete cynics. You guys really made your point well. I, for one, can't wait to see Alexandre Aja's remake of *The Hills Have Eyes*, in part because of Jovanka's impressive editorial. John W. Bowen's interview and Dave Alexander's well-written review. Thanks for the amazing insight.

Stephena Whitcroft — Fort Worth, Texas

I'D LIKE TO congratulate Jovanka Vuckovic on her second issue as EIC! If there was any worry about the future of *Raw Morgue*, it has been successfully abated. Furthermore, *RM#54* is one of the best issues of the last couple of years. As usual, it's a model of just how to cram loads of information into a magazine and have it come off as being the professional, thoughtful, evocative publication it has always been. Keep up the amazing work, you're truly an inspiration to all of us "in the genre."

Matt Hill — atrocitiescinema.com

AS A LONG-TIME reader of *Raw Morgue*, I just wanted to say that I was completely impressed with *RM#54*, in particular, the in-depth coverage of *The Hills Have Eyes* remake. The original remains one of my favorite '70s horror films and Alexandre Aja's *Hills* Toronto has earned a place on my top ten list of contemporary horror efforts. This is one remake that I am actually looking forward to and should prove to be anything but tepid. As a long-time fan of genre magazines beginning with *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, I also wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Jovanka Vuckovic as this latest issue, in my opinion, sets a new standard with interesting and well-written articles throughout. I cannot help but have very high expectations for the magazine in the future.

Eric Mehta — Montreal, Quebec

AS USUAL, *RM#54* was full of great information and insightful writing. However, I would like to offer an alternate opinion on Werner Herzog's 1979 *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. The film is not a narcissistic indulgence on the part of Herzog, but rather an attempt to re-legitimize Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Weimar cinema in general in the wake of

the atrocities of Nazism and WWII, which created a historical blind spot (not to mention an enduring sense of guilt) in German cultural memory. At least since Siegfried Kracauer's book *From Caligari to Hitler*, German Expressionist cinema has been viewed as a portent of the real-life horrors that were to befall Europe in the 1930s and '40s. In this light, Herzog is trying to pull Murnau's film out of the repressed shadows of Germany's past and into the light of the present so as to reclaim it as a part of "aesthetic" German culture as well as celebrate the legacy of Weimar cinema outside of the national trauma inflicted by Hitler. Herzog's remake is not in the same category as the slew of crass Hollywood remakes whose sole purpose is to make money off the artistic work of the past.

James Finnara — Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I PICKED UP my first issue (*The Exorcist*, *RM#16*) several years ago and I have to say that with each passing month I have watched the magazine mature and also enlighten me to things I would have never heard about. Case in point: the work of Edgawa Ramo (*RM#54*). Every time I think that I'm the ultimate J-Horror geek, you pull something out that I have to admit I have never heard of. Thank you for your continued coverage of international horror (especially of the Japanese persuasion) and your devotion to everything horror (not just the movies but the books, music, etc.) I already can't wait until the next issue.

Gabriel "Luchihan" Llanas
— Greeley, Colorado

I WANTED TO thank Stuart Andrews for the glowing review of my short film, *One Has. Bathing Towels Love Soap* (*RM#54*). I was just looking forward to being printed in the best horror magazine in the world, so for Stuart to write such praise is a bonus. I'm currently looking for funding for the feature-length version of the short. Since this is my first feature, the search has been rather difficult, but with support from such a great publication, it's going to be a little bit easier. Thanks

Christophe Davidson — address withheld

WHILE I ADMIT to not being a fan of the current gore/torture revival, and even taking into account, I can't comprehend how *Hosts* Toronto could make anyone's "best of" list, let alone be *Raw Morgue's* pick for best horror film of 2005. Maybe the pickings were slim, but how could such

a derivative slasher flick with only ad agency-styled slickness to recommend it come out on top of *Land of the Dead*? Maybe Romero's latest isn't quite on par with his very best work, but to even put *Hosts Toronto* in the same competition with such a strong, engaging film suggests the long hours have taken a toll on your staff. Now that I've vented, let me add that I enjoy *Raw Morgue* very much and loved the Roger Corman feature. Maybe I'm too old (38) to represent your core readership, but I'd like to see more emphasis on movies that put atmosphere and storytelling above bloodshed. Gore certainly has its place in the genre, but it seems to be stealing the spotlight lately.

Joel Wicklund — Niles, Illinois

I JUST STARTED to read *Raw Morgue* and am very impressed — and the price isn't too bad as well! The main reason I am writing is to ask you how come you guys never bring your conventions out west — a sort of *Raw Morgue* west coast thing? Just wondering. Anyway keep up the good work!

Paul Marshall
— Vancouver, British Columbia

There are no immediate plans to host the Festival of Fear in other cities. We hope to see you in Toronto this September 1 - 3.

HEY GHOUls and gals. Just wanted to thank y'all for another great issue of *Raw Morgue*. Kick-ass retrospective on the Corman/Poe stuff, excellent coverage of kids' horror lit and special thanks for doing an article on Anthrax. I've been listening to these dudes for going on twenty years. It's nice to see them get an article outside the usual metal magazines. They're a great band and thankfully they haven't sold out. You people are awesome, and keep fighting the good fight.

Rick Snyder — Upstate New York

Correction: Last issue we resolved the original The Hazing, which was made in 1963. Raw Morgue regrets the error.

Our magazine needs to read your comments online or in print. Letters may be edited for length and content. Please send to info@rawmorgue.com.

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Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Del Toro readies *Pan's Labyrinth*, anticipates future monster movies

Having finally worked his way through a monstrous maze, filmmaker Guillermo del Toro finds himself looking for a new destination. The director, whose previous works include *The Devil's Backbone*, *Blade 2* and *Hellboy*, is in the final stages of post-production on *Pan's Labyrinth*, the mythological horror-fantasy film that's been his labour of love for the last two years. Once he's done touring it on the festival circuit—prior to its North American theatrical release in August—he'll start his next film. He's just not sure what it'll be.

"I went away to do *Pan's Labyrinth* for two years, and I come back and all these things are simultaneously lined up. *Hellboy 2* still goes first," he says of the project that's the lead contender for his next movie. "If they accept the budget we will be shooting by the fall."

If Sony's Revolution Studios doesn't greenlight the sequel to his 2004 adaptation of the Mike Mignola comic book series, though, del Toro's still got two other features waiting in the wings. The highest profile one, which he says he could start shooting this year if the script and budget are approved soon, is *Halo*, the adaptation of the mega-hit Xbox game.

The intergalactic first-person shooter adventure pits a super-soldier against legions of nasty aliens, including the parasitic Flood, which take over and mutate their hosts into zombified, often tentacled, creatures. It's a leap away from *Pan's Labyrinth* (which he describes as "very violent stuff and very poetic"), but del Toro, an avid gamer, was hooked on the story the first time he played the title.

"Creatures, monsters—the single most

attractive thing for me in *Halo* is *The Flood*," he laughs. "Eighty percent of the guys in it are monsters—what else could he be? The hero is fucking Frankenstein; Master Chief is a put-together biomechanical guy with an enhanced body. He's David Carradine's Frankenstein in *Death Race 2000*!"

The other feature del Toro hopes to direct is *Killing on Carnival Row*, written by newcomer Travis Beccam. The story is a "noir scenario" about a wrongly accused man, but what makes it unique is that it's a "Steampunk" tale set in an alternate, retro-futuristic Victorian world where devices like phones and video exist as products developed with the technologies of the time.

"Our references are the same: Lovecraft, Victorian-themed horror, etc.," says del Toro of his affinity for Beccam's script, which he's currently helping make revisions to. "All of that, it was a match made in heaven. If we do that movie it would be such a beautiful, embroidered universe."

Aside from also helping several Latin American directors get their films off the ground by acting as co-producer, del Toro has been working towards his ultimate dream project: an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*.

"For a studio it's such a hard thing to figure out—there's no love story, it's period [-



Pan from Guillermo del Toro's upcoming *Pan's Labyrinth*

set], and it's basically [explorer Edward] Shackleton meets Edgar Allan Poe meets a fucking crazy biologist. It's really quite complex," he says of the film, which would require a huge budget for its special effects and remote locations. Although del Toro had concept art and even maquettes of some of the monsters made, the filmmaker is doubtful the project will come to fruition anytime soon, although he remains optimistic.

"I really believe I'm too in love with the monsters," he admits of his commitment to the film. "Why did I do *Music*? The monsters. Why do I do anything? *Blade 2*? The fucking monsters. It's always the fucking monster. I can be doing anything in a movie, a creature walks in and it's a different shoot, I love it so much."

Dave Alexander

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Rob Zombie back in musician's saddle with *Educated Horses*

Dreadlines

After spending nearly four years working on *House of 1000 Corpses* and its sequel *The Devil's Rejects*, horror rocker-cum-filmmaker Rob Zombie has returned to music with the release of his third solo album, *Educated Horses*. The record, which hit stores on March 28 from Geffen Records, is subtler in terms of its genre content, but harkens back to Zombie's unusual childhood, spent in the dusty fugee of haunted houses and carnival sideshows.

"The whole record is based around stuff I remember as a kid," Zombie tells *Rue Morgue*. "As a kid I always had to work at these sideshows and carnivals because that was the family business I grew up in. My grandparents, my mom and my dad—that's what they did for a living. 'Educated Horses' was one of the attractions for the trained animals."

The record, which features song titles like *Sawdust In The Blood*, *American Witch*, *Let It All Bleed Out*, *Death Of It All*, and *Lords Of Salem*, is almost entirely based on the carnival experience.

"Sawdust In The Blood is a term for carnies, which could really apply to anyone who spends their life on the road, you know, because the sawdust they throw down in the circus tent, it's in your blood," Zombie explains. "The whole record revolves around those concepts. *Death Of It All*, which is one of the more mellow songs with acoustic guitar, is all about all the bizarre carnival attractions I used to see... That's why I think *Tobe Hooper's* movie *The Funhouse* resonates with me so much, because as a kid that was my whole life. I'd sit inside haunted houses all day and never see sunlight."

Naturally, for horror fans, the most notable track on the record is *The Devil's Rejects*, written by Zombie after the release of his film in an effort to keep the filmmaking experience alive for him (much like he did with the song *House Of 1000 Corpses*). With the two Southern-set films under his belt, it's not surprising that the record that followed them has a decidedly western



Rob Zombie plans to return to the director's chair following his *Educated Horses* tour.

twang to it at certain times, and a cinematic tone at others.

"I think that came from spending so much time with [*Devil's Rejects* composer] Tyler Bates maybe," says Zombie. "While scoring the picture, he would come up with these things that could work for a score, or for scary music on a metal record, stuff that just crosses the line, I guess it rubbed off on me."

Collaborating with [ex-Marilyn Manson guitarist] John 5, Zombie's new album strips down the characteristic movie sampling and industrial elements of his previous records, allowing the virtuoso John 5 to experiment with new sounds using anything from a twangy steel guitar to an Indian sitar.

Warmed-up by goth-metal band Lacuna Coil, Zombie's *Educated Horses* tour kicked off on March 17th in Jacksonville, Florida and will hit 27 cities, including Toronto on April 4th, before concluding in Mesa, Arizona at the end of the month. Zombie also plans to re-team with *Devil's Rejects* cine-

matographer Phil Parmet to direct a music video for the anthem single *Foxy Foxy* in Los Angeles. In the meantime, he continues work on his bizarre, adult animated film *The Haunted World of El Superbeasto* (directed by *SpongeBob SquarePants* scribe and voice actor Mr. Lawrence, and co-produced by Film Roman and IDT).

He reveals: "If *Austin Powers* was actually a 400-pound alcoholic Mexican wrestler and he lived in a world that was basically populated by The Munsters and strippers, that would be this film."

Of course, there's more horror to come from Rob Zombie. He's been in talks with *Masters of Horror* creator Mick Garris about directing an episode of the show in the future, and (as of press time) is only a couple of weeks away from making a big announcement on another genre film he's planning to direct, which he says is "definitely a movie that everyone will have something to say about."

Jovanka Vackovic



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Dreadlines

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FROM THE
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www.ultimateromero.com

This new website promises to keep fans apprised of all the latest news from the George Romero camp, including upcoming projects and appearances. Be sure to visit the message boards, as well as the online store for rare autographed merch.

www.toddschorn.com

Step into the valley of finks and weirdos at "low-brow" artist Todd Schorn's personal website. For the uninitiated, this is by far some of the strangest, smartest and delightful pop culture fine art you'll ever see.

www.thecemeteryproject.com

Michael Reed has a macabre hobby: he visits the burial sites of "famous, infamous, and unusual personalities", then collects factoids and photos of these final resting places for his website, which contains info on over 1000 graves.

www.gothicroseseantiques.com

The online shop for this California-based antiques store offers up a little of everything you need to creep out your crib, from Gothic and Victorian pieces to urns, iron gates, funeral collectibles and even taxidermy.

www.girlsandcorpses.com

Who doesn't love girls? And corpses? The two come together for some deviant debauchery (all captured on film) in this online mag. More than just booty and the decomposing dead, there are also interviews, reviews and a sex tips column (!).

World Horror Con brings top genre writers to San Francisco

An ominous fog, albeit metaphorical, will shroud the city by the Bay this May, as a veritable onslaught of horror authors, publishers and booksellers descend upon it in the name of the 16th annual World Horror Convention. From May 11-14 San Francisco will host the annual event, which is held in a different North American city each year (Toronto has been earmarked for 2007). Taking place at the Golden Gateway Holiday Inn, WHC 2006 will feature author readings, Q&As, panel discussions and a mass autograph signing, as well as an art show, charity auction, gross-out contest and, for the first time, a film festival component.

This year's Guests of Honour include authors Clive Barker, Kim Newman (*Anno Dracula*), and Koji Suzuki (*Ring*, *Dark Water*), publisher John Pelan (Darkside Press), artist Brom, and official toastmaster Peter Stramb. Honoured guests are selected based on their contributions to the genre, their standing within the horror community, and rules set forth by the World Horror Society (the founding and governing body behind WHC), which ensures a minimum four to five-year period between repeat guest of honour stints.

While primarily known as an industry event, WHC is open to the general public and offers up programming—including the infamous annual gross-out contest where writers compete before an audience to tell the sickest story—that will appeal to fans and professionals alike.

"Most of our attendees are people who read, whether just as fans, writers, publishers, editors, etc.," Chad Savage, co-chairman and co-ordinator of the art show explains. "There's also a higher level of appreciation for art and other methods of dark expression."

Fellow co-chairman Darren McKeeman elaborates: "As far as the casual fan goes, it's a great place to get autographs and see the cutting edge in horror. Since it is meant more for professionals, there are some things a casual fan won't take advantage of—we feature pitch sessions to sell novels,

workshops to hone writing and editing skills, and lots of networking." He adds that the dealer's room, which features some 30 merchants this year, will appeal to one and all, and is the perfect place to find one-of-a-kind items.

But the dealer's room is not the only opportunity attendees will have to shop at World Horror, as the annual Charity Auction promises to play an integral role in the con. Previous auctions have offered rare and autographed genre books and movie memorabilia, among other items. All proceeds raised in this year's auction will benefit the American Humane Association.

"This came about because of the Hurricane Katrina disaster," says McKeeman of the charity selection. "After the hurricane, our friend (and long-time convention attendee) Poppy Z. Brite had to leave her multitude of cats in her home in New Orleans... I decided before this that I'd let Poppy pick the charity this year, and her exact words were 'Make it whoever rescues my cats.'"

In keeping with this community aesthetic, the Saturday night programming will kick off with an artists' reception, in conjunction with the annual art show, this year featuring genre talents such as Chad Michael Ward, Jason Felix and Alan M. Clark. Additionally, guest artist Brom will have works on display, who also provided art for the WHC 2006 program book and T-shirts.

This year also marks the inaugural inclusion of a film festival component to the weekend's proceedings. While the exact film line-up was unconfirmed as of press time, the screenings—which will take place from dusk through dawn at the hotel—will include a mix of old and new titles. Two films have been scheduled to premiere at the event, Mike Mendez's *The Gravewalkers* and an adaptation of Matthew Costello's novel *Beneath Still Waters*.

For more info on WHC 2006, and to purchase tickets, visit whc2006.org.

Monica S. Kuehler

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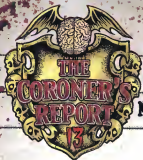
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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

- + The remarkably preserved body of Johannes Pope was found in her Ohio home on January 4, 2006, two years after her death. As per her last request, Pope's corpse was left in front of a television in an air-conditioned room. Her friend and caretaker, Kathy Painter, removed the maggots from the body daily in order to slow decomposition.
- + Before shooting the ossuary scene in *Antropophagus* (1980), prop bones were rented because there weren't enough real ones left at the location, an actual crypt. Later, the clean-up crew accidentally returned all of the bones – real and fake – to the rental company, which then gave the real ones back to the filmmakers. They eventually came to rest in director Joe D'Amato's basement.
- + In old-time Germany doctors would often recommend sheep's brains to sooth an infant's mouth while teething.
- + Actor Glenn Strange played the part of Frankenstein's monster in three films shot during the 1940s. When Boris Karloff died some twenty years later many newspapers misprinted photos of Strange in the role, miscrediting his performances to Karloff!
- + English poet Lord Byron died as a result of a bloodletting performed upon him by doctors with hopes of curing his malarial fever.
- + The modern word "cobweb" has its roots in the Middle English word for spider: "coppe".
- + Stephen King had his first short story, *I Was A Teenage Graverobber*, published in the *Caveweb Review* magazine in 1966 – eight years before the release of his debut novel *Carrie*.
- + Chinese water torture was invented by a 16th-century lawyer.
- + *I Spat on Your Grave!* lead Camille Keaton is the grand niece of silent film superstar Buster Keaton.
- + In the times before anesthetic, hospital porters would hold down patients while doctors operated.
- + Lon Chaney Jr., who appeared in *The Mummy's Tomb*, *The Mummy's Ghost* and *The Mummy's Curse*, candidly admitted that the character (Kharis) he played in these films was the "least rewarding" of his career.
- + A popular superstition in Middle Ages England held that those who stood beneath the gallows and allowed themselves to be bled on by a corpse would be cured of leprosy.
- + Actress Ingrid Pitt (*The Vampire Lovers*, *The House That Dripped Blood*) was born – as Natasha Petrovna – on a train en route to a WWII Polish Concentration Camp.

Compiled by Melissa S. Kuebler
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com.

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



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Rock in the early 1960s the European genre film hit puberty and a strange new breed of kinky, nightmarish cinema evolved, maturing into a successful coupling of eroticism and terror, with vociferating degrees of explicit nudity and gore. A peek at the perverse pleasures of this brief and often overlooked movement in horror proves that no one's ever done sex 'n' death quite like the Europeans did.

SINEMA OF FLESH AND BLOOD

by Chris Alexander



Sex and death bookend our very existence, driving us, controlling – whether consciously or subconsciously – every single move we make. The horror genre has always been, at its core, an occasionally crude and often violent outlet to explore and exploit these two base visceral fixations of the human experience. From the orgiastic paintings of Hieronymus Bosch to the thinly veiled metaphors of sexual awakening in the most gruesome of the Grimm's Fairy Tales; the bodice-gripped bosoms of Victorian-era terror to the pain/pleasure dynamic of the Marquis de Sade, erotic horror has been a staple of our collective art culture since the first horny cavewoman scrawled on a wall.

It is with the dawn of the 20th century however, with the medium of film, that this eternally potent melding of the sexual and the shocking would truly find its footing, forging fine lines between titillation and depravity, while showing the previously unshowable. Though audiences both attacked and embraced the horror film throughout history because of its cheap thrills and moral ambiguity, screens really started to burn up with the advance of the 1960s Eurotic horror boom.

Sparked by the full-colour films of UK studio Hammer (through the brutal beauty-and-the-beast thrills of *Frankenstein* and the violent stake/fang penetrations of *Dracula*) and fuelled by the perverse pulpiness of French and Italian comic books, eccentric fledgling European filmmakers began finding more devious ways to push the fluid-spattered

"I don't make sex-horror films; I instead use naked girls as a surrealist tool, like painting."

JEAN ROLLIN



Zombie Lake: One of Rollin's 'surrealist' films.

envelope and fully realize dark and dirty imagery previously only hinted at. Continental grindhouse gurus such as Jess Franco (*RM44*), José Lamaz (p.22) and Joe D'Amato (p.21) would, between the years 1962 and 1986, become the kings of the popular, controversial and profitable sex-horror subgenre with their wildly uneven outputs exported to movie houses internationally. Both drawing thrills from the penetration of the body, horror and pornography often shared space at the grindhouse, and making the two seemed like a double-your-pleasure-double-your-fun no-brainer.

But the relationship between scares and skin became more uneasy for directors when hardcore porn became *de rigueur* in the 1970s. With *Deep Throat* ushering XXX into the cinema, many of the previous softcore artists were forced to create even raunchier versions of their dark fantasies, sometimes adding hardcore scenes (or having them added by producers) in order to secure lucrative distribution deals. Many even made straight-up sex pictures for the increasingly curious raincoat market – often under pseudonyms to avoid being ghettoized.

As home video replaced quarter booths and dirty movie houses in the '80s and '90s, a new market of straight-to-video and cable softcore arose, which included erotic but much less artistic (usually lesbian vampire-themed) horror, while hardcore dropped any arty pretenses – horror or otherwise – in favour of graphic sex acts. Shooting on video became the economical norm, and the lurid but often ambitious horror erotica of past decades seemed to fade away into obscurity.

Recently, the relationship between horror and pornography has begun to undergo another change. A new strain of cheaply produced exploitation titles like *Re-Penetrator*, *XXCordist* and *Slaughter Disc* have surfaced that break a long-standing taboo of combining hardcore pornography with buckets of gore. Not surprisingly, art doesn't factor into the equation (see p.24).

Through all this, among all the gleeful taboo-smashing, carnality-inclined, celluloid sin-singing, one filmmaker has stood apart. He's an artist who from his first film embraced erotic horror as a canvas to make surreal

and lyrical art house films, a director who has both fought against and yielded to the demands of making sex-soaked grindhouse horror movies, a survivor who has worked in hardcore pornography under a pseudonym, and a workhorse who continues to bring a distinct authorship to the world of nightmares and nudity.

A renaissance man who applied his passions to all mediums, Jean Michel Rollin Le Gentil was a respected documentarian, essayist, advocate of surrealism and writer of sexy *Barbarella*-esque adult comics before he turned his eye to the motion picture lens. His world changed in 1967 with the release of his first full-length commercial film, the ultra controversial and obscenely hallucinogenic freak-out *The Rape of the Vampire*. Though the picture would discredit him with the mainstream film elite, it was profitable and set the tone for his creative destiny. Over the next 30 years Rollin would become one of the world's most prolific purveyors of sexually-aware, dreamlike horror and adult films. From the aching longing of *Lips of Blood* (1975) to the impossibly lustful bloodletting of *Fascination*, the tainted zombie wine of *The Grapes of Death* (1978) to the romantic little-ghoul-lost antics of *Living Dead Girl* (1982), Rollin makes movies that are loaded with explicit sexuality, frequently nude female vampires and occasionally graphic carnage (many titles are available in North America from Image Home Entertainment, licensed from Salvation Films in the UK).

But his films, as fevered and lowbrow as they may be (1981's *Zombie Lake* serves as a helping of his more admittedly rotten fruit), are almost always juxtaposed by a distinct sense of natural beauty and bittersweet melancholy. Now in his late 60s, the once reviled, still active (his last picture, *Fiancée of Dracula*, was released in 2002) writer/director has, over the years, developed a loyal cult following of Eurosize burfs and upper-crust cineastes alike.

Rue Morgue mounts, so to speak, an exploration of the relationship between horror and pornography in cinema, beginning with the unfeigned and inimitable Jean Rollin.

You are known primarily as one of the pioneers of European erotic horror. How did this come to be?

When I was making my first picture [*The Rape of the Vampire*] my producer thought it would be great if I could somehow find a way to put a naked girl in the film. I said, "Why not?" These kinds of films were becoming increasingly popular in America and in Europe, so I did it. The film

was a scandal, though not because of the nudity, but because the film was too abstract for the French audiences. We had riots in the theatres, people were outraged at how strange it was. For my next picture, I decided to again explore vampirism and again put in some naked girls... It worked for me, I liked it. I don't make sex-horror films; instead I use naked girls as a surrealist tool, like painting.

Do you think there is an innate visual and thematic connection between sexuality and horror?

Probably, but again, I don't think of my horror and fantasy films as sex films, I think they are erotic. I think of them as a kind of poetry, fantastic and sad. For example, an image I have used often is that of an old graveyard with cold grey stones and so on. By having a beautiful nude woman walking through that grave-



"I'm not embarrassed by my porno films. However, I think of my softcore work as more intimate, risqué and dangerous."

JEAN ROLLIN

yard, through the crosses and statues, perhaps holding a torch or a lantern, she is a symbol of light and beauty in the dark. Very poetic.

Why is juxtaposing the nude female form against a backdrop of death and decay so visually appealing to you?

I don't know exactly. I can't properly articulate it. It just creates a mood, a feeling, something that speaks to me. This kind of aesthetic is best represented in my last film, *Fanciote of Dracula*. In the first scene I have a naked girl – very white, very pale – wandering through the night and she is so bright, she is a light. Then, a finely dressed dwarf walks up to her and speaks some romantic, tragic words. It's that subconscious, surrealist element that I don't think can be explained, just felt.

French and European audiences have been known to accept and embrace sexuality better than those of North America. Were you ever frustrated at the level of censorship your pictures received overseas?

Actually, I think the worst responses I received were from the French audience! For many, many years I was hated by French critics and audiences alike. They always interpreted what I believed to be interesting and powerful as ugly.

It was very difficult for me. Whenever one of my films would play at a French film festival, people would yell, or leave the cinema. But in America and England, even though yes, sometimes certain scenes were edited, I was always well received, it was always fine. In France I have always been a little producer and a little director but I am probably one of the only French filmmakers who has consistently had his pictures sold in America and abroad.

After *Lips of Blood* in 1976 you spent the next two years working making only straight hardcore porno films under the pseudonyms Robert Xavier and Michel Genêt. Why?

Well, around this time, because of movies like *Deep Throat*, hardcore pornography became very popular in Paris and distributors were free to screen it wherever they wanted. So, all the little cine-

mas that would show my vampire films immediately stopped showing them because they were too tame, and instead showed only porno films. I had to eat, you know? So in order to live, I started making X-rated films. I did what I had to do, as did many other small European filmmakers at the time.

Are you proud of your work in porn?

It was not a bad experience at all, it was a happy environment and I'm not embarrassed by my porno films. However, I think of my softcore work as more intimate, risqué and dangerous, actually.

You returned to horror in 1978, with the controversial *The Grapes of Death*, cited as the first French gore film. What drew you back to horror?

The Grapes of Death was conceived at a time when disaster movies, like *Earthquake* and *The Poseidon Adventure* were very popular. So, many French producers said that if you could bring them a little disaster film, they will give you some money. I really wanted to make another horror film, so I said why not cross the disaster movie with the horror movie? The producer of *Grapes of Death* agreed that if the film was like *The Poseidon Adventure*, why not make it horror? So I did. If you remember in [*The Poseidon Adventure*], the characters are struggling to get from one side of the boat to another. In *Grapes of Death* I have a girl trying to get from one side of the country to another while running away from the living dead. I was also always very impressed by the film *Night of the Living Dead*.



In an exclusive interview, the
luscious and lascivious **LINA ROMAY** reaffirms her title
as Europe's most famous and fearless exhibitionist.

SEXPLOITATION SCREAM QUEEN

by Chris Alexander



Every artist, no matter what his chosen medium, has his muse, and notorious Spanish exploitation filmmaker Jess Franco's remains the lovely Lina Romay. The iconic and uninhibited Romay has starred in over 50 films for the controversial director.

Born Rosa Maria Aymiral on June 24th, 1954 in Barcelona Spain, the model/actress adopted the handle of Una Romay in her teens and embarked on a prolific and remarkable career in film. Romay first appeared in a bit part in Franco's 1972 *Daughter of Dracula* and soon became his greatest object of desire. With her completely exposed performance in Franco's intensely voyeuristic 1973 mood piece *Female Vampire* (pictured), Romay would prove to be the feminine extension of the director: a woman who was kinky, absolutely fearless and willing to do anything to get the film in the can.

As the decade progressed, Romay continued to push her boundaries with pictures like *The Perverse Countess*, *Lorna the Exorcist*, *Isa, the Wicked Warder*, *Class of the Zombies* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*, while also

freely embracing the industry's growing trend towards hardcore pornography, starring in (and, in some cases, directing) a handful of European XXX sex features.

Still fearless at 52 (and still freely indulging in onscreen exhibitionism), the audacious Romay continues working and sharing her life with her ever-controversial mentor.

Rue Morgue has a curt tête-à-tête with the fiery performer.

What got you interested in making erotic horror films?

The man who proposed it to me: Jess Franco.

What is the connection between sex and horror in cinema?

It's something very subjective, but I think that in film, what is horrific and erotic are united. From Hitchcock to Lynch, you can see this.

Why did you choose to adopt the pseudonym Lina Romay as your professional name?

She was a Cuban singer who I liked a lot and who I used to listen to with her husband and my friend Xavier Cugat.

What is the line between exploitation and empowerment?

And what is the difference between being quiet and playing the trumpet?

The films you've been involved with were often dismissed as "exploitation." How do you feel about that?

Why do you ask this question? You seem like a McCarthy-era judge. Maybe the films are discredited in Salt Lake City, but in Paris, Berlin and London many of them are considered masterpieces and are often shown in film houses.

Is there a difference in the way European women and North American women respond to your films?

I haven't had the time to ask American women in the time I've been in the USA, but I fear they are more reactionary than we are.

Under the pseudonyms Candy Coster and Lulu Laverne you starred in and even directed several hardcore sex films. Why did you decide to make the leap to adult films and how do you feel about them today?

I've always decided what films to make. For a time, adult cinema interested me, I was tired of the bullshit of the Spanish and American censors.

Are there any films you've done that you think went "too far"?

In a recent interview, Charlotte Rampling said that as an actor, she has no moral limits, only aesthetic ones. An intelligent woman, Miss Rampling.

Jess Franco is your closest collaborator and long-term partner, what is the secret of your enduring creative and personal relationship?

I think it must be love.

Are you working on any new film projects?

Always. I suppose they may even surprise you sometime soon.

P.S. I admire very much the great American cinema; I have fashioned myself from it. And I hope that, despite everything, it will return to its former greatness of the '40s, '50s and '60s. ♀





Living Dead Girl (1970) by Joe D'Amato. Photo: Franco

It was a movie that succeeded because of its sense of claustrophobia. In my film I decided to open it up, so the monsters and the heroine were running free through the dark countryside.

The film was, for the time, incredibly graphic. Did you receive any backlash because of it?

We had many, many problems with the censors in France. We received an X rating, the same rating as the hard sex films.

What are your views on other European erotic horror filmmakers like José Larraz, Joe D'Amato and Jess Franco? Do you consider yourself their contemporary?

No, I am very, very different from them. For example, Joe D'Amato's work has no script, no real dialogue, no characters—he's films exist only to shock. Franco is entirely different, he'll shoot anything. He works simply for the pleasure of shooting. He's a good guy, but he accepts any project given to him. You say, "Franco, make me a comedy," and he does. You say, "Franco, make me a sex film," and he does. He just loves to make movies, any movies!

You have worked with Franco before, no?

I was asked by [French exploitation film studio] Eurocine to shoot some zombie scenes in the 1970s and I did not know what for. I shot them in one day and only realized a few years ago, after someone gave me a DVD of the film, that



my footage ended up in Franco's *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*. *Hopefully you were paid well!* Paid? [laughs] What is this "paid" you speak of? Marius Lescoeur, the director of Eurocine offered me 100 francs to do the shoot and I said, "Listen, keep your 100 Francs, what can I do with this?" I did it for free as a favour. Marius is dead now, and I mourn him. He was a lover of cinema and a great character.

*What about *Zombie Lake*, that was an abandoned Franco film that you completed, no?*

Yes, but I never worked with Franco. That film was not a good one, there was no script and no one knew what the film was about!

Which one of your films do you cite as your favourite?

I think all of my films are effective for different reasons, but I think my favourite — though not necessarily my best — is *Requiem for a Vampire*. I wrote that film in two or three hours. I was very naive at the time and I think the film reflects a certain innocence about life and death. However, I think my best film is undoubtedly my last one, *Fiancée of Dracula*. *Lips of Blood* was my best script, but because of terrible production problems, the film did not turn out as I had wanted it to.

Do you plan on making any more films?

I am currently trying to make my last film, I am just looking to find the money to do it! It is another erotic vampire film that will contain footage from each of my previous films as dreams, as visions framed by a new story. I will only need to shoot perhaps one hour of new footage.

What are your thoughts on the current leanings toward extreme sex and violence in horror films?

It is too much. They rely far too much on computers and digital special effects. In *Grapes of Death* I utilized many prosthetic severed heads and much fake blood but it was real, there was a level of craftsmanship and a feeling that what was happening was truly happening in front of you. I also believe when you put sex and cruelty together, it is no longer erotic and it does nothing for me. There is far too much cruelty now for my tastes. Even though my vampire films have strong sexual elements combined with horror, they are more romantic, they are more fantasy films, more like the films I saw as a child. Films like *House of Frankenstein*, *House of Dracula*, and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*.

Those days are long gone, unfortunately. Yes, but the pictures are not...



In a career that spanned three decades and hundreds of films, the notorious sleaze merchant **JOE D'AMATO** was known for making some of the hardest sex films to ever come out of the 1970s Eurotic horror cycle.



HARDCORE HOLOCAUST

THE XXX HORROR FILMS OF JOE D'AMATO

by Jovanka Vuckovic



In contrast to the vampy art house erotic cinema of Jean Rollin, Italian Joe D'Amato—born Aristide Massaccesi on December 15, 1936—became known for making almost every type of exploitation film known to man, under even more pseudonyms, with varying levels of explicit onscreen sex. Sometimes referred to as “Italy’s worst director,” D’Amato had his sticky fingers in all kinds of pies, often stealing ideas and titles from his contemporaries and mixing them with heavy smut to make a saleable title.

Among his hundreds of films are several Emanuele movies, unholy horny nun flicks (images in a Convent, 1979), would-be cannibal entries (Anthropophagus, see pg.76, and the Cannibal Holocaust take-off Porno Holocaust, 1981), the Tombs of the Blind Dead/Fulci’s Zombie rip-off Erotic Nights of the Living Dead (1980), and sticky wads of straight-up, unabashed hardcore porn made after the Italian horror film industry collapsed (Anal Paprika, 120 Days of Anal, Anal Palace, House of Anal Perversions, etc.). D’Amato just might be the reason the term “Eurotrash” was coined, but he’s unique in the genre because of the shameless pride he took in his work, consciously aware of the difference between erotic and pornographic cinema.

“For me, eroticism is what hardcore is not,” the late D’Amato says in an interview called *Tubily Erotic* (available as an extra on Images in a Convent from the Media Blaster’s imprint Exploitation Digital). “Hardcore completely destroys eroticism. Eroticism is voyeurism, that is, everything you

peep at without other people’s knowledge.”

Like the rest of his European erotic horror brethren, D’Amato’s films were often released in different cuts depending on the country they were being shipped to, and as a result many of his films—exposed of much of their sexual content—arrived in North America as nonsensical third-rate horror titles. But thanks to the perky smut peddlers (and we mean that in the nicest possible way) at Media Blasters, many of D’Amato’s films are now available in their uncult, explicit XXX versions. And though it’s unclear exactly who, in fact, wants to see Mark Shamon’s wart-riddled balls in an extreme penetration close-up (via *Porno Holocaust*), it’s important that these rare exploitation entries can finally be seen for what D’Amato made them to be: shock films.

“I like making horror movies, just like erotic ones for that matter, because I like to shock my audience. When you go and watch a movie you have to be involved in it. To shock the audience is the best way to involve them. Cannibalism, of course, must be shocking because watching somebody eating someone else is not something that happens every day,” D’Amato explains, referring to *Porno Holocaust*, his most well-known title, but nowhere near his most accomplished.

“I often steal from others and since [Ruggiero] Deodato’s movie [*Cannibal Holocaust*] had been so successful, we thought of something along the



same lines,” D’Amato says of his inspiration for the infamous film (available uncult from Media Blasters), which mixes the shock of hardcore sex with a flesh-eating, island monster/rapist. Movies like *Porno Holocaust* and its pseudo-sequel *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (shot back-to-back for penises on an island in Santo Domingo) are

prime examples of what made him a legend to cult film fans—they’re terrible, traumatic, and thereby treasured.

But by the early 1980s D’Amato was balls-deep in an admittedly shameful period of hardcore porn movies, creating over a dozen in just a few years under various pseudonyms—for purely commercial reasons.

“Porn is not erotic,” D’Amato admits. “That’s the point, an erotic movie means to spy, to peep, while with porn flicks it’s all so evident that to me it does not really convey any erotic emotion. I make hardcore just for a living but I do not particularly like it.”

Trying to step away from the adult film industry in the 1990s, the self-described “professional craftsman” put plans into motion to return to the kind of extreme sex and gore films he made in the ‘70s but sadly died of a heart attack on January 23, 1999 before he got his chance. Of course, we’ll never know what aberrations D’Amato might have gone on to create, but given his existing catalogue of depravity, there’s a good chance he’d never have been able to top it. **B**

SPOTLIGHT
EUROTIC HORROR

In a candid interview, 77-year-old cult filmmaker **José Larraz** reveals himself as a somewhat reluctant hero of the Eurotic horror movement of the 1970s.



FANTASTIC FLESH

The Erotic Horror Cinema of José Larraz

by Jovanka Vuckovic

One of the more obscure but no less compelling filmmakers who falls into the Eurotic horror wave of the 1970s is Spaniard José Ramón Larraz. Born in 1929 in Barcelona, Larraz spent his early professional years as a comic book illustrator, creating strips and illustrations for a variety of Spanish publishers, as well as *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines, before discovering fashion photography and, of course, cinema. Unlike the deliberately sleazy films of his compatriot Jess Franco or Francophone Jean Rollin, and certainly unlike the hardcore smut of Joe D'Amato, Larraz's films are less overtly sexual, but typically much more atmospheric and unusual.

Larraz expatriated to England (after a fifteen-year sojourn in Paris) in the late '60s where, in a twist of fate, he landed a stand-in job on *A Fistful of Dollars* when an actor took ill. He was also offered the opportunity to create a low-budget softcore sex film (which were very popular at the time) with funding from one of his Belgian book publishers. Shortly thereafter Larraz created three low-budget films — *Whisper!* (1968), *Deviation* (1971) and *Scream and Die* (1973) — that, in the hands

of the foreign director, were a departure from the English tradition of horror that Hammer had effectively established.

Larraz broke British horror conventions by imbuing his films with mystery, employing unusual camera angles (inspired by his work in comics) and photographing the English countryside using moody compositions that captured the landscape's bleakness — giving it a menacing presence of its own.

On the merits of his first three films, he was able to make his underrated masterpiece *Symptoms* (1974), starring Donald Pleasence's daughter Angela, and edited by Brian Smedley-Aston (who went on to edit *Blue Sunshine*). After the stunning *Symptoms* caused a sensation at the Cannes Film Festival, Larraz was approached by Smedley-Aston to create another movie, which became the surreal lesbian-cult classic *Vampyres* (1974).

"The films I enjoyed making the most were *Symptoms* and *Vampyres*," Larraz tells *Rue Morgue* from his home in Spain. "Vampyres was from the private money of a good friend of mine, the editor of *Symptoms*, Brian Smedley-Aston. He was in love with *Symptoms* and when we returned to England from Cannes he told me,

'Jose, if you are capable of making me a film with sexploitation and violence but with the same quality as *Symptoms*, then I'll produce it.'"

Though *Vampyres* shares the theme of lesbianism with *Symptoms*, the two movies were markedly different. As per Smedley-Aston's request, the film had more sex, which Larraz handled confidently — and perhaps more intensely than anyone else making erotic horror in Europe at the time. The result is a steamy, atmospheric and curious film that blends eroticism, surrealism and horror; a film that continues to be celebrated by cinephiles and sexploitation fans alike. Unfortunately, pressure from producers to put even more sex and violence in his next few films would result in an oversaturation of these subjects in his work, which presented Larraz with a dilemma.

"I don't like to put things in my films that are not necessary," he explains. "It's not because I am a prude, it's because my stories could be shot without so much sex and without so much blood. What I like is the study of fear, not horror, not guts, not blood — fear."

But the pressure was too much for Larraz (who just wanted to make movies), so he succumbed to their wishes. "If I was the producer of my own films they would have turned out very different," Larraz admits. "I never work for big



compares, so I am always depending on the producers, who want to make money. And they always insist [on] putting a lot of sex, exploitation, however you wish to call it, into them, or a lot of blood. It's not my personal taste but unfortunately in my life I was very bad in public relations and wasn't able to make good contacts with important people, so I am always at the mercy of these producers."

Although Larraz has made films in several different genres (comedy, psychological thriller, historical biopic), he's most often regarded as a exploitation filmmaker, a title he's never been entirely comfortable with.

"My filmography is varied, I've made very sexy, bloody films, and others are almost puritan," the 77-year-old filmmaker says. "I am not a particularly erotic person. I started off as an artist. I draw for comics books and paperback covers. For me the naked human body is art. And to put a naked woman in a movie for no artistic reason is essentially trafficking the bodies of women. If there is not beautiful photography or any art to it, to me it's simple pornography."

For Larraz, who's been called a pervert, sleaze, and smut filmmaker by various informed critics over the years, there has always been a clear distinction between what is erotic and what is pornography.

"The difference is that usually in pornography there isn't a single story and there is also penetration," He elaborates. "In *Vampyres*, for example, you never see the penis of a man entering a woman. As a matter of fact, I've never shot a movie where you see the penis of a man. Porno films bore me because there is no art and no story to them. It's not a problem of morals, it's just that I find them repulsive."

What some people do find repulsive and disquieting about Larraz's films is the bizarre, intellectually sexual imagery that can sometimes be found in them. In a dream sequence in *La visita del vicio* (a.k.a. *The Violation of the Body*, 1977) — a film that Larraz has always been uncomfortable talking about — we witness the strange visage of a nude woman crouching inside the rear end of a mock horse about to be mounted by a naked man on a stallion. It's a perverse scene to be sure, but Larraz made sure to handle it delicately.

"When I was a comic book artist I made a sketch one day of a naked woman inside a false horse and a real stallion right behind it, and I decided to put it in the movie because I find a certain beauty in that shot," he comments. "But I never took it any further than that. If you put that scene in Jess Franco's hands it would probably have a massive penis and be attacking the other horse!"



Vampyres: Larraz's most successful and accessible picture.

"For me the naked human body is art. And to put a naked woman in a movie for no artistic reason is essentially trafficking the bodies of women."

José Larraz

(Hardcore sex scenes were later added to some cuts of the film, namely a grindhouse version of it retitled *Sex Maniac*, and an Italian video release dubbed *Sodomita*.)



Artistic vision notwithstanding, Larraz has struggled throughout the years to tell his stories the way he wants to tell them. With the exception of *El Mirón* (1977), Larraz's restrained Spanish "Peeping Tom" film, he was forced much of the time to make films he didn't want to make — as is the case with his last (and worst) exploitation flick *Los Ritos sexuales del diablo* (a.k.a. *Black Canines*, 1980).

"What can I tell you? I am a professional. I was married with three children and I needed money to feed my family so I made the film," Larraz admits, adding, "I make [erotic horror], but I disagree when people say that it's part of my personality, because it's not. I'd prefer that people identify me more with *Symptoms* — which is not a bloody film, a gory film, or a sexy film — or these Spanish films I've been making that allow me to tell a story without all that unnecessary sex and blood."

Larraz is referring to his more recent work for Spanish television, his miniseries *Goya* (1985), an expensive production dealing with the famous painter's affair with the Dutchess of Alba. In this case the filmmaker was absolutely free to put a lot of sex into *Goya* if he so desired, but producers were surprised when they saw the restrained dailies. Larraz also tied his hand at two gory slasher flicks during the 1990s (*Rest in Pieces* and *Deadly Manos*), but they were poorly received.

Now, 33 years after the successful *Vampyres*, Smedley-Aston and Larraz are toying with a sequel, this time adding witches to the mix. But though the script is already written, Larraz is having difficulty securing financing for the picture and says that because he's "not Coppola" he's afraid he'll be once again be pressured to add heavy sex and blood to the story just to attract interest from European producers.

"*Vampyres 2* could be shot very erotic but without necessarily showing so many naked women, but that's what the producers want. It's always the same story." At the same time he's quick to add, "I'm not a renegade for the films I've made. If I made a movie, I can't put all the fault on the backs of the producers. I could have said no, I am not ashamed to have made these films because I don't think they are really so horrible or pornographic. I try very hard to make them beautiful." ☼

SPOTLIGHT
EROTIC HORROR

Make way for **Splatter Porn**, a new breed of goreography that goes to outrageous extremes. Is it a viable new subgenre, or does personal lubricant and fake blood mix like oil and water?

SCARED STIFF

Jeanne Angel

by Stuart Andrews

It is our basic fear of death and perhaps, more specifically, our fear of what lies beyond the grave that provides the fertile, imaginative realm from which the greatest horror stories spring into existence. Working in direct opposition to these fundamental, mortal fears however is the human sex drive—the reproductive instinct being our only realistic means of escaping the grim certainty of death. The harmony between these two primary impulses will forever bind the notions of sex and horror together. Whenever death is in abundant supply, the reproductive instinct will inevitably go into hyper-overdrive. And if the exploits of slasher icons Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers are to be taken seriously, the same can be said when the situation is reversed.

But despite the extent to which sex and horror are intrinsically woven, in cinema at least, there has always existed a certain, unspoken boundary between these two curious bedfellows. Even in the most exploitative of genres, there's a fine line that separates the heightened desire we experience at the sight of sexually explicit images and the trauma we experience when viewing scenes of pure viscera. Take the ritualistic rape scene in *Cannibal Holocaust* or the necrophilic fumbings in Nacho Carda's *Aftermath* (RMM47) for instance: unless you suffer from some strange pathological condition, any real potential for sexual arousal is completely consumed by the sheer terror of the images. Such films are not asking you to experience a heightened state of desire; they're demanding you share a moment of existential horror.

And conversely, in the case of the many XXX-rated, hardcore sex "horror" movies in existence, their primary intent is to evoke a sexual response in the viewer with the horror elements merely serving as a backdrop for scenes of frolicking fornication. You don't rent films like *Dawn of the Dead* and *The Texas Asshole Massacre* (or even one of Joe D'Amato's notorious porno epics) unless you're committed to an evening of some serious pud-pulling shenanigans.

Recently, however, the delicate balance of the porn-gore continuum has been upset by the emergence of what appears to be a new subgenre altogether that dares to ask something entirely new of the audience: one that brazenly equates the vicarious thrills of a dishonourable discharge of marmite with the shock and awe of a severed jugular's arterial spray. Make way for *Splatter Porn*, the latest cross-pollination of genres hell-bent on smashing down some of the few remaining sex and horror taboos in cinema.

When the history of horror movies is written for the last time, one film will undoubtedly be identified as the video nasty responsible for spearheading the *Splatter Porn* subgenre: *Slaughter Disc*. Written and directed by David Quimby—*a San Diego filmmaker who's no stranger to experimenting with the mashing together of wildly differing genres* (his previous film, *Clown Porn*—*The*



Movie combined XXX with stand-up comedy) — *Slaughter Disc* is an interesting, if seriously flawed, attempt at a legitimate horror film that incorporates scenes of explicit, hardcore sex.

It tells the tale of an unfortunate drudge named Mike (Robert Williams) who sits around all day, pulling the turkey's neck in a horribly lit apartment. And just when it

seems as though things couldn't get any more depressing, a DVD mysteriously arrives in the mail featuring the deliciously evil and undead *Andromeda Strange* (seasoned porn actor Caroline Pierce), who proceeds to sexually ravage and mutilate, on video, several unfortunate victims. During one particularly gruesome moment, she rides a hapless sap while simultaneously smashing his face to smithereens with a hammer, then swallows down the little bits of blood and skull fragments. Mike is immediately obsessed with her and can't stop watching, eventually coming to the horrific realization that the victims in the video are being murdered in real life.

You're never quite sure whether to jerk off or throw up, and to add insult to injury *Slaughter Disc* (available at steelwebstudios.com) has all the cinematic integrity of a corporate training video. Instead of artistry, the film possesses little more than a juvenile impulse to shock and disgust audiences with extreme images, making it apparent that there are some lines that shouldn't

be crossed. Regardless, Outimyer has begun production on his next entry into the Splatter Porn subgenre, a short film entitled *May Order Bride* which details the homicidal exploits of a demented love doll.

The other entry in this strange new subgenre hearkens back to the days when horror filmmakers plundered the porn genre in order to compete with the commercial success of hardcore sex films — except in reverse, as *Re-Penetrator* is a porn that attempts to cash-in on the booming horror industry.

For Halloween 2004, porn stars Tommy Pistol and Joanna Angel (creator and owner of Burning Angel Entertainment) wanted to come up with a horror-themed porn flick, so they hired Troma Film's former head of production, Doug Sakman, to write and direct. He came up with *Re-Penetrator*, a splatter porn spoof of Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*.

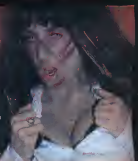
In this brain-dead and painfully campy exercise in poor taste, Tommy Pistol plays Dr. Hubert Breast, a mad scientist with a big dick who concocts a batch of green ooze which he injects into a deceased stripper, bringing her back from the dead as a mumbling and fumbling, cock-hungry zombie. What proceeds from here is twenty minutes of awkwardly-staged and laborious pornography. The sex scenes themselves feature an incredible amount of stage blood, and the actors are visibly uncomfortable performing in such conditions. It all culminates with the female zombie riding on top of the good doctor while simultaneously eviscerating him and feasting upon his flesh.

The actors often break character to laugh at each other but it's a joke the audience isn't in on. Instead, *Re-Penetrator* emerges as a retarded confluence of genres that works neither as a porn flick nor a horror movie — apparently the condition of the entire subgenre itself.

(*Re-Penetrator* is currently available on repenetrator.com, and Burning Angel will follow it up with *The XXXorcist* in September. Future planned titles include *Night of the Giving Head*, *Evil Head* and *Thursday the 12th: Jason Comes Early*.)

**Whether you like it hard or soft.
Rue Morgue gets two viewpoints
on contemporary erotic horror.**

LUST vs. LECHERY



Michael Raso is the founder and president of ei Independent Cinema, whose subsidiary label Seduction Cinema has produced softcore horror take-offs like *The Erotic Witch Project* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mistress Hyde*. Joanna Angel is the founder and president of Burning Angel Entertainment, which has made the gory hardcore horror spoofs *Re-Penetrator* and *The XXXorcist* — titles she also stars in. Here's what they think about mixing red and pink.

Why mix sex and horror?

MR: I've directed, produced or distributed films from just about every genre — and it's with horror erotica that my company first found success. With the market begging for erotic product, and my boredom with most of what was already available, mixing it with my favourite genre resulted in an avid fan base that's stayed with us throughout the years.

JA: I firmly believe that people should fuck in every movie. One day if I become president, I'll make it mandatory.

Describe your audience.

MR: Our demographic is college-aged and male. However, there are a surprising number of female fans, which I credit to the mixture of genres as well as the "lesbian" element of the simulated sex in most of our erotic productions.

JA: Very untypical of what you would think of people who watch porn. My "fans" are all a bunch of people I would hang out with — a bunch of rock 'n' roll-looking nerdy perverts, just like me.

From a business standpoint, what are the drawbacks and benefits of mixing your brand of adult content and horror?

MR: From a business standpoint, the decision to mix genres — or

make softcore films in general — has had decidedly mixed results. On the one hand, it afforded my main label at that time with ready distribution and my company with a steady cash flow; on the other hand, I — and my company — have been typecast.

JA: No one wants to buy it, and it's so sad to make something you love and not be able to get it out into the world because it's considered "obscene" by the man.

Are there any lines you do not cross?

MR: Since erotic films are not submitted to the MPAA ratings board, we can get away with certain things not allowed in an "R" film. Specifically, blood and sex in the same scene is usually a big "no-no" with the MPAA. However, there are many, many guidelines in regards to sexual content we cannot cross without getting out of the "erotic" genre and into the "hardcore" genre. "Crotch shots", penetration and oral-genital contact are strictly taboo. Frankly, though, that's not something I have to worry about as no one actually has sex in our films.

JA: I think we crossed every line in *Re-Penetrator* and *The XXXorcist*. If I wind up in jail, my mother said she would bail me out. So at least that's reassuring to know.

Dave Alexander



Robert Kirkman takes a big and bloody bite out of the superhero genre with *MARVEL ZOMBIES*. The *Walking Dead* creator explains what happened to the classic men in tights after Marvel placed its entire universe in his maniacal hands.

DAWN OF THE DEAD HEROES

by GARY BUTLER

They're coming to get you, Magnus....

As zombie apocalypses go, the scene is not unfamiliar: in the once-busy downtown core of a blighted urban landscape, a horde of ravenous ghouls pounces on its latest victim. Within moments, Magnus, the "fresh meat", disappears under the rabid pack and is swiftly ripped to shreds. On the sidelines, a brief altercation: one zombie, unaware that his stomach is riven and spilling guts (not his own), doesn't take it well when another proceeds to steal his food, right out of the fissure. The rest of the horde, satiated for now, disperses, many of the zombies sitting down to rest. One starts to examine his bloody hands and clothes. "Dear God — what have we become?" asks Spider-Man. He sees The Hulk clutching his split stomach, Thor gnawing on the stolen remains of Magnus, a.k.a. Magnebo, and shakes his head, "I think I just want to die!" Okay, as zombie apocalypses go, this is something entirely new.

"That's where the disconnect becomes real and horrific," says writer Robert Kirkman, discussing this key sequence in the first issue of his book *Marvel Zombies*. "These are superheroes (who are now) zombies, capable of terrible atrocities and unable to stop themselves."

The thing with *Marvel Zombies* is that it's not about just Spider-Man becoming a zombie, or Daredevil, or The X-Men — it's about every single hero under the Marvel Comics imprint being

undead and powerless to fight it. On its own, this concept is interesting enough. But horror aficionados will appreciate the central twist driving Kirkman's book, as the superhero motif is ultimately of secondary importance. Forget for a moment that the cannibals wear tights; what makes *Marvel Zombies* truly different in the horror pantheon is the fact that it's really about the zombies, not the survivors.

"The thinking was that if the superheroes had all become zombies — and they had — then the story had to be about zombies instead of people," says Kirkman, best known for *The Walking Dead* (AMC), his acclaimed, ongoing zombie saga. "I told Marvel, 'Fine by me! I write about survivors milling around in the apocalypse all day.' Writing about actual zombies was something new."

New indeed. Conventional zombie characterization has little to do with character. But as Kirkman points out, superhero comics sell because of their characters. So not only did the heroes have to become zombies, they also had to remain interesting, which meant remaining self-aware. In typical genre entries, the staples of madness, brain death, disease, cannibalism and resurrection paint the picture of the "everyzombie." Kirkman was working with, essentially, über-zombies, and while his book is rife with moments of stark-black humour (Thor eating "biscuits" from The Hulk's stomach being a prime example), *Marvel Zombies* is every bit a tragedy.

Its protagonists are men and women capable of doing great good — people with a history of, and a



lifelong commitment to, acts of heroism. But they are helpless in the face of their mutated hunger, and while they regret their terrible actions, they cannot prevent this behaviour from repeating. As a friend describes it, their plight is comparable to vampirism but without that subgenre's air of romance.

"Yes, they have nifty costumes," Kirkman grants, "but there's nothing sensual about decomposing maniacs. They are fallen, they are pathetic, and they are repulsive in both their appearance and their actions." Kirkman adds that the superpowers enhance the tragedy, making the outcome of any zombie vs. human situation absolutely impossible to prevent. There's simply



Marvel's top-tier superheroes reborn as savages... the combatants in Robert Kirkman's *Marvel Zombies*

no escape. "They're superheroes," he says. "They're unstoppable." The comic genre known as capes 'n' tight's traditionally involves hope salvaged in the face of bloody struggles — good conquering evil, albeit often at great cost. Not so in this undead universe.

Marvel Zombies actually goes further than most subgenre entries, letting readers bear witness to the very final moments of a devastated world. It dares to ask the question: What happens when the last man on earth falls, when the "food" is all gone, when the apocalypse itself ends? The answer is as uniquely horrific — and as uniquely comic book — as the story itself. But to understand the ending of this superhero apocalypse, we need to first go to its beginning.

In early 2005, the second collected anthology of *The Walking Dead* had topped the graphic novel sales charts. It was a significant achievement for a non-"big two" (Marvel and DC) publication, and Marvel editor Tom Brevoort phoned the writer to congratulate him.

"[I responded] — half-joking because Marvel just doesn't do this kind of stuff! — 'If you ever have any project with zombies, I'm your man,'" Kirkman recalls. But Brevoort took the offer seriously and called back a couple of days later to ask Kirkman if he wanted to take the reins after an upcoming story for Marvel's *Ultimate Fantastic Four*, one that involved zombies. Called *Crossover*, the plot involved the *Fantastic Four* being contacted by their own selves from an alternate earth — one under siege by superhero zombies.

"[UFF writer] Mark Millar had thought it all out in terms of the broad strokes," Kirkman says, acknowledging "the inspiration behind the heroes

all being self-aware zombies. That said, *Crossover* was a quick-hit, three-issue arc (so quick-hit that the story proper only starts on the final page of the first issue), with more than half of the action taking place on the non-zombie earth.

"Marvel wanted something bigger, y'know, meatier. And I told 'em I love meat," Kirkman adds.

As is often the way of things in the industry, Kirkman was writing his outline for *Marvel Zombies* long before Millar's *UFF* story, eventually published from September to November 2005, even hit the street. This proved to be problematic, as Kirkman's original idea was to make one particular superhero, Luke Cage, "humanity's last hope." Better-known as Powerman, the hero with unbreakable skin, Cage should be impervious to zombie bites, but in *Ultimate Fantastic Four* Cage is prominently portrayed as having turned

In hindsight, Kirkman is actually glad that his idea for Luke Cage didn't work out. "It was an average story," he admits. The basic plot involved "humanity's last hope" turning out to be a traitor, an undercover agent coerced into servitude because the zombies are holding his pregnant wife, superheroine Jessica Jones, hostage. Essentially, Powerman would have been helping to feed the hands that bite.

Moving forward, Kirkman spent a long time grappling with the idea of super-powered zombies who have nothing to eat (another Millar contribution had been the logical conclusion that the uber-zombies would blitz the planet in no time at all, which is why they contact another earth in *Crossover*). It was clear that a greater threat was necessary. Was it possible to hunt the hunters?

**MARVEL
ZOMBIES**



**MARVEL
ZOMBIES**





Indeed it was, suggested another Marvel editor, Ralph Macchio (no, not the Karate Kid). One of the central themes of *Marvel Zombies* is humanity devoured by its heroes. But the Marvel stable also includes a character that is less a supervillain than a force of nature beyond good and evil, a cosmic god whose raison d'être is nothing short of literally devouring entire planets. Send in Galactus, Macchio said, and see what happens. Kirkman remembers rubbing his palms in glee, because it was obvious, "the kids weren't going to play nice."

Typically, that play involves rules.

"I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't [George] Romero rules," Kirkman says. "Everyone does them — hell, I do them in *The Walking Dead*." Romero rules, of course, involve eating over thinking, walking over running. While the new rules of self-awareness and tragedy characterizing the zombie superheroes were challenging enough, Kirkman was astonished to learn that his tale was being granted exemption from traditional Marvel guidelines: for once, the heroes did not have to save the day.

"I disregarded the all-important fact that this is a Marvel comic," Kirkman explains, "I was kinda worried for a day until they got back to me. Their only correction was, they said, Magneto should really say the following in this one panel. Man, that was it. I figured that [artist] Sean [Phillips] was going to be redrawing stuff throughout the process, and suddenly it looked like we had 'the power'! And that was confirmed when the first issue came out untouched and gory as hell. It

makes sense, because how else are you going to make the Marvel zombies credible zombies? It astonished me the amount of leeway we were given. Marvel is crazy, man — the lunatics are totally running the asylum."

Last December, hot on the heels of the *LOF* story, *Marvel Zombies* came sprinting out of the gate. Unexpectedly, the comic sold out and went into a second printing immediately, becoming the fastest book in the company's history to do so. Faster, Kirkman comments, than the also-recent blockbuster *Spider-Man: The Other*. "When you're bigger than Spider, that's when you know that you've done something right — or at least different."

Kirkman also points out that much of the credit for the series moving so fast is due to the gruesome, eye-popping (sometimes literally) covers, which are zombieified takeoffs of classic ones from the Marvel universe. At press time, six covers have been released (the sixth being a new image for the second printing of issue #1), each one an homage to a classic, iconic Marvel cover — including *Spider-Man's* first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, and Kirkman's favourite mock-up, *X-Men* #1 (future cover concepts for this summer's collected volume may include riffs on *New Avengers* #1 and *Daredevil* #179). And those covers are just as delectable as the inside art, with gore-soaked faces, missing limbs and even *Zombie Wolverine* sporting a mouthful of eyeballs.

Kirkman gleefully mentions reading a thread on an online message board suggesting that his comic might make the government consider ban-

ning horror comics again, re-invoking the infamous '50s Comics Code that held the industry in a stranglehold until the late-'80s. At the time of writing the script for the first issue, though, Kirkman remembers that, having the go-ahead for what would prove to be the ugliest comic book in Marvel history, his mission had become clear.

"After getting script approval on that [first] one," he says, "with every issue, I just tried to top it. Whatever depraved thing I had done before, I wanted to go further, in search of Marvel's limit. More than once, they told me to 'go to town' and basically do a lot of really, well, unflattering things with their icons."

So he did. In issue #2 *Zombie Giant-Man* uses his proportionately gargantuan teeth to decapitate his admittedly annoying wife, *Zombie Wasp*, after she catches him secretly snacking on the leg of his human hostage (his former friend *Black Panther*, no less). By the fourth issue, *Zombie Hulk* is "recycling" the head of cosmic vector *The Silver Surfer* by chewing on it, swallowing it, and pulling the undigested chunks out of his breached intestine.

"I'll tell you one thing: it certainly never, ever, ever occurred to me to have a *Walking Dead* zombie keep re-eating the stuffing from his gut-shot stomach. That was pure, unadulterated, 'nothing's sacred' *Marvel Zombies*," allows Kirkman. "Just describing that was racy, not to mention undignified, but I was being true to the story."

When the series wraps this month with issue #5, the zombie apocalypse goes even further, reaching interplanetary proportions. So is there life after world-scale death? The answer is yes — this is comics, after all, a medium notorious for extending itself. *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #30, released this May, one month after the *Marvel Zombies* finale (make no mistake: Marvel's editors are thorough planners), sees the return of the *Zombie Fantastic Four*, previously imprisoned on "real" Earth in *Crossover*.

In terms of a possible sequel, Kirkman hints at the fates of *Zombie Wasp* and *Zombie Hawkeye*, the former kept alive and somewhat rational among the humans in what amounts to a biohazard suit, the latter missing in action over the course of the five-issue smackdown.

Comic book and zombie fans alike are — wordplay very intended — eating it all up with an unparalleled appetite. Without a doubt, Robert Kirkman has produced one of the most refreshing takes on either genre in years. As the artist points out, there's just something incredibly powerful about the mightiest of mainstream heroes committing the most unimaginable of atrocities.

"[*Spider-Man's*] comments to himself about eating his family are funny to the reader for a split second, until you realize that he *did* eat them. There really is a lot of bleak humor going on underneath all of the black humour, not to mention all of the superhero trappings." ☞

Take a ride back into **DEADWORLD...**
the original zombie splatter comic.

WHERE THE DEAD DON'T DIE

by JOVANKA VUCKOVIC



No examination of the current zombie comic trend would be complete without a look back at *Deadworld*.

The ambitious title from the short-lived Arrow Comics imprint shuffled into comic shops in 1986 after the direct market opened up, facilitating a flood of graphic, independent black and white comics for adults. After co-publishers Ralph Griffith and Canadian ex-pat Stuart Kerr achieved some success with their first title *The Realm*, they followed up with a zombie series specifically designed to suit the macabre style of a young artist named Vincent Locke, and *Deadworld* sputtered to life.

The hard-to-find first series featured a group of teenagers who, a few weeks after a mysterious supernatural apocalypse has turned the populous into flesh-craving "zooks", are trying to survive on a commandeered school bus in Louisiana. Early on they're besieged by a trio of intelligent "zombie bikers" led by wise-crackin', Harley-ridin' King Zombie, a character who looks a lot like Iron Maiden's Eddie wearing Rob (Judas Priest) Halford's biker gear (and whose modern-day real-life equivalent might well be Dog the Bounty Hunter). It was a nod to Romero's then-trilogy that expanded on the concept of learning zombies years before Uncle George put Big Daddy on the undead honour roll in *Land of the Dead*.

What initially drew horror fans to *Deadworld*, of course, was its level of violence. Each issue (printed every three months) was released with both tame and graphic covers that bound an ultra-gory Satanic story arc in which King Zombie attempts to open a portal to a demon world, so all hell can literally break



loose and wipe out the "warmies" for good. Writer Kerr's early editorials specifically addressed censorship in comics and his liberal position on the matter. He published the first issue with a warning for potential buyers on its cover: "Recommended For Mature Audiences", and by #6 changed it to "Not For Wussies".

But horror comic fans kept reading for more than gore. The story, though dated today ("I guess we'll never know if Roth will get back together with Helen," laments one of our fearless teens), was the *Walking Dead* of its time. A dedicated group of characters were cast with longevity over zombie food in mind, and though it was sometimes hard to differentiate the illustrated characters because of Locke's sketchy, dark-haired style, all relationships were clearly developed before pen was put to paper.

By issue #8 Kerr turned in his pen and Locke took over writing and illustrating. With the Arrow imprint quickly collapsing, he offered the title to Caliber Press, who tried to ramp the series up to a monthly with issue #10. But irregular publishing averaged *Deadworld* out to a quarterly release and soon Locke became bored of writing, so new writers were brought on. When he got tired of drawing zombies (and busy with *The Sandman* over at Marvel),

new artists were brought on, and *Deadworld* was never quite the same. Issue #26 ended the series in 1996.

Followed by brief miniseries and crossovers, a second series appeared from Caliber but lasted only twelve issues. *Deadworld* was revived once again under the Image banner in May of last year with Gary Reed writing and Locke inking, but by issue #3 he abandoned the project once again and was replaced by Croatian artist Dalibor Talajic. That incarnation appears to be in a come for the time being, but Locke's original series still has a special place in the black hearts of horror fans.

Locke further lent his gory art aesthetic to the album covers of notorious death metal band Cannibal Corpse, then achieved some notoriety on *Batman* and *The Spectre* for DC before illustrating John Wagner's *A History of Violence*, the graphic novel upon which the 2005 David Cronenberg film was based. But just like you can't keep a good zombie down: *Deadworld* won't die.

Reed's website has announced a May 2006 release for a CD collection of all official (and rare) *Deadworld* issues, as well as a self-contained graphic novel with Locke back on inks for Halloween of 2006. The series has also been optioned for film adaptation by George Clooney and Robert Lawrence's Maysville Pictures, with distribution from Warner Brothers, so it's possible we haven't seen the last of that mullet-sportin', chain-smoking King Zombie yet. ☠



A virulent plague has spread throughout the comics industry, leaving us in the grip of a full-scale zombie invasion. *Rue Morgue* surveys the landscape for the deadliest titles.

CORPSE COMICS

by SAM COSTELLO



Whether turning big-name superheroes into shambling wrecks in *Marvel Zombies* or telling his own apocalypse tale in *The Walking Dead*, Robert Kirkman is the current king of zombie comics. But he's just one of many artists across the medium

with undead tales to tell. From black and white indie graphic novels to gory manga imports to full-colour series by top-tier artists in the industry, zombies off all persuasions are fighting for rack space at your local comic shop. Here's an all-points bulletin of four-colour zombie sightings.

THE ABANDONED

Ross Campbell

TokyoPop

Rylee and Naomi are two small-town punk rock girls living in Georgia, where a hurricane mysteriously kills everyone over the age of 23. They don't stay dead for long, though, and soon the girls are forced to survive on their own against zombies – all while falling in love with each other. Though Campbell's quieter, personal moments of horror are engaging, the most appealing things about *The Abandoned* are his two-tone, muted art – reminiscent in places of Frank Quitely – and his unusual (for comics, anyway) portrayals of gender and sexuality. There aren't a lot of horror comics that treat gay characters with as much respect and normalcy as *The Abandoned*, and fewer that portray the variety and shape of women's bodies in such a positive way. These elements alone make *The Abandoned* worth checking out.

BLACKGAS

Warren Ellis and Max Fiumara

Avatar Press

With familiar character types and story structure, *BlackGas* is essentially a horror movie on paper. It begins with college student Tyler bringing his girlfriend Soo to meet his parents at their home on Smoky Island, off the coast of northern New England. It's a place rife with menacing hillbillies, ominous geography (the island has a black mountainous "bulge" in its centre) and a legend of ancient evil involving the

massacre of Native Americans. While Tyler and Soo steal away for a horny romp, the island's bulge splits, releasing a cloud of black gas. They return to discover murderous locals with black liquid streaming from their eyes and mouths. Though at first *BlackGas* feels a bit like stock Ellis (Hellblazer, *Wolverine*), the story soon grows its own legs. And although not always consistent, Fiumara's art conveys action well. Overall it's a solid zombie comic and a must-have for Warren Ellis fans.

ESCAPE OF THE LIVING DEAD

John Russo, Mike Woller and Dheera Verma

Avatar Press

As co-writer of the original *Night of the Living Dead*, John Russo brings a reputation to this project which is based on a story he wrote (adapted by Mike Woller, *Strange Killings*, Friday the 13th: *Bloodbath*). Unfortunately, *Escape of the Living Dead* contains none of the innovation, terror or, quite frankly, quality of Russo's more famous work. The story, such as it is, picks up three years after *NatLD*, with a new outbreak. There are sketches of



a plot involving a scientist experimenting on zombies from the original outbreak, but that's only hinted at, then dropped in the two following issues (the series wrapped after press time). Lowlights of the series include an unfrightening gang of "hippies" who speak like someone's grandfather trying to sound young, and some deeply tasteless nudity. *EscLD* simply lacks the basics: a developed story, well-defined characters and art that clearly depicts what is happening. Avoid it like a zombie plague.

FEAR THE DEAD:

A ZOMBIE SURVIVOR'S JOURNAL

Michael Alan Nelson and John Bolton,

Eric Powell, Guy Davis, et. al

Boom! Studios

This one-shot, originally to be penned by Steve Niles (*30 Days of Night*) and released this past January, was handed off to writer Michael Alan Nelson (*War of the Worlds: Second Wave*) and now streets this month. A guidebook to surviving a world overrun by the undead, it's "written" by one of the few surviving humans, and punctuated with pin-ups from some of horror comics' biggest names, including John Bolton (*The Yattering*), Eric Powell (*The Goon*), Guy Davis (*BPRD*) and Chase (Steve Niles' *Dawn of the Dead* adaptation).

SHAUN OF THE DEAD

Chris Ryall and Zach Howard

IDW Publishing

Shaun of the Dead creators Simon Pegg and Nick Frost produced this adaptation of their zom-com



triumph, which includes additional scenes that didn't make it into the film (plus, this compiled version tosses in extra pin-ups not in the original four-issue series). Zach Howard's art liddly captures the humour and horror of the source material, so what else is there to know – Shaun rules in any format!

REIKO THE ZOMBIE SHOP

Rei Mikamoto
Dark Horse Manga

Although the perky schoolgirl dressing is typical, the concept of *Reiko the Zombie Shop* is original.

The oddly-named title character rents out her resurrection services to bring back the dead, but takes no responsibility once the usually vengeful and violent zombies are running around. Rei Mikamoto's art is detailed and unexpectedly gruesome (bodies ripped in half, beheaded children), which makes up for the twisted, but occasionally silly, storylines.



A TRIP TO RUNDBERG

Nate Southard and Shawn Richter
Frequency Press

This indie-published tale has a solid premise: the town of Millwood makes it through the first stages of a zombie outbreak with minimal trouble... then the food supply runs out. Now, Millwood has selected five suckers, er, heroes to make a food run to the next town over, Rundberg, which is packed with 3000 zombies.

The black and white art and repetitive panelling are lo-fi, but the action-packed story – obviously influenced by *The Walking Dead* – is balley, with some nice touches of black humour. Writer Nate Southard has promised more tales from this grim Romero-esque world, making *A Trip to Rundberg* a tasty appetizer for indie comic zombie freaks.

WAR ON FLESH

Justin Boring, Greg Hildebrandt
and Tim Smith III
TokyoPop

Going against the brain-eater grain, TokyoPop brings the zombie back to its Haitian

voodoo roots with *War on Flesh*. The set-up: hundreds of years ago a tribe successfully fought a witch doctor that planned to unleash a zombie curse – the *War on Flesh*. In the present, a boy born to the witch doctor's descendant is murdered and his father is driven mad with



An alternate cover page from Chris Ryall and Zach Howard's *Shaun of the Dead*.

grief. Tempted by evil spirits, he renounces God and kills a priest. When a ghostly witch doctor helps him resurrect his son as a zombie, events begin that threaten to resume the apocalypse. Though *War on Flesh* shambles along a different path than most zombie comics, it's no more satisfying than the average outbreak story. It lacks tension, the dialogue is plain, action seems orchestrated, and the art is average. Though *War on Flesh* is an interesting change, it's not a great improvement.

ZOMBIE TALES

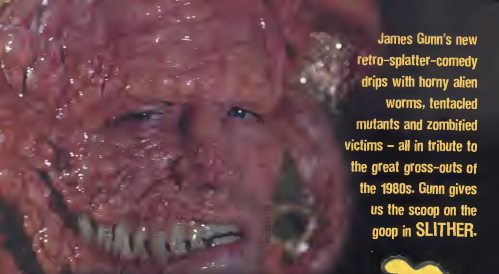
Mark Waid, Keith Giffen, Rom Lim et al.
Boom! Studios

Boasting big names like Mark Waid (*Fantastic Four*), Keith Giffen (*JSA*), and Rom Lim (*Silver Surfer*), this series of one-offs feature innovative, often poignant stories ranging in tone from the contemplative to the comedic. There's not a traditional tale in the bunch,

with one of the most original coming from the relatively unknown (to comics) team of John Rogers (the aborted TV adaptation of Warren Ellis' *Global Frequency*) and Tom Fowler. Their story, *Memento Mori*, takes zombies to the Arctic and – without giving too much away –

fuses some insights into zombie physiology with a frightening pattern. The series has spawned several issues, including the two-part *Zombie Tales: Death Valley*. With the freshest takes of any undead comic in recent memory, *Zombie Tales* is a must for any fan of living dead. ☞





James Gunn's new retro-splatter-comedy drips with horny alien worms, tentacled mutants and zombified victims – all in tribute to the great gross-outs of the 1980s. Gunn gives us the scoop on the goop in SLITHER.

INVASION OF THE SEX SLUGS FROM OUTER SPACE!

by Dave Alexander

If you're going to use one word to describe James Gunn's new splatter-comedy, its title, *"Slither"*, works just fine – although "Whore", "Penetrate", "Ooze", "Impregnate", "Infect", "Impersonate", "Invade" and "Annihilate" also capture some of the extraterrestrial gross-out mayhem in the movie. The 35-year-old Gunn, who's known for penning *Tromeo & Juliet*, the live-action *Scooby Doo* movie and the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, directed (as well as wrote) his first feature with *Slither* (in theatres in North America March 31st), a movie that both pays tribute to, and tries like hell to top, those beloved gore-gag-filled films of the '80s.

It's destined to be a cult classic, and not because it's the balls-out kind of movie that doesn't get made much anymore, but because it's not content to simply ride the goopy coastlines of past genre glories. With a Hollywood budget (estimated on the Internet Movie Database to be \$20 million), a killer cast and a respectful love for movies like *The Deadly Spawn*, *The Fly*, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Shivers*, *Squirm* and *The Thing*, *Slither* blazes its own sticky trail.

The film stars Nathan Fillion – best known as Captain Malcolm Reynolds on Joss Whedon's *Firefly* series and its spin-off feature *Serenity* – as small-town lawman Bill Pardy. Trouble begins in his otherwise sleepy jurisdiction when a pod crash lands in the woods and is discovered by repetitively-named local man Grant Grant. Played by an outrageously-cast Michael Rooker (*Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *ARMY*) sporting a

shaved head and giant George Romero-sized spectacles, he's infected by an otherworldly spore and begins to change.

Grant's already troubled marriage to his much younger wife Starla (Miss Brant in Sam Raimi's *Soldier-Man* series) is tested even further when he starts hiding out in the basement, buying truckloads of raw meat, and, most distressingly, mutating into a tentacled creature (he tries to pass it off as a minor skin irritation) that looks like something out of Brian Yuzna's *The Beyond* or John Carpenter's *The Thing*... If one of those monsters were run through a dirty deep fryer.

Although it's a marital crisis even Dr. Phil would balk at, it's only the disgusting tip of the deadly iceberg. As neighbourhood pets, and then people, go missing, it's up to Bill, his small police force, some gun-toting locals and even perpetually flustered Mayor Jack MacReady (veteran TV character actor Gregg Henry, who also appeared in *Firefly*) to hunt down Grant before the entire town is zombified by his slug-like offspring.

Smart, funny, genre-aware, and driven by lovable characters, *Slither* does for the splatter-comedy subgenre what *Shaun of the Dead* did for the zombie movie.

Rue Morgue happily dives neck-deep into the plasim to get the details from Gunn on a mainstream horror-comedy that does things right. Hold your nose: it's slime time.

"I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING IN THE HORROR GENRE THAT WAS A RETURN TO THE FUN, GORY, OVER-THE-TOP COMEDIES OF THE 1980s."

JAMES GUNN

You've worked on comedies, family films and serious horror movies, so why make your directorial feature debut with a splatter-comedy?

It really was just the way it happened. I got done with *Dawn of the Dead*, I was attached to direct another movie that looked like it was gonna happen, but it was a very low-budget kind of film — it had a lot of fantasy elements in it but was very independent. So I started writing *Slither* as basically a screenplay I was gonna sell and pay some bills [with] while I was off directing my first feature for the year, basically making no money. As I wrote *Slither*, I fell in love with it, and by the time I was at the end of writing the screenplay, it had such an unusual tone that I felt uncomfortable handing it over to another director.

What is that tone? Where are you coming from with this film?

What was really important to me first and foremost was the characters, that we have interest in the characters, that we like the characters — I think it's a story about human beings. And at the same time I wanted to do something in the horror genre that was a return to the fun, gory, over-the-top comedies of the 1980s. Over the past few years we've had a lot of horror movies, and what happens is we just get one type of horror movie for a couple of years at a time, and then the cycle changes and we get something else. In the '90s *Scream* came out and suddenly all we had were these semi-tongue-in-cheek teen comedies that were basically slasher films, and then we had *The Grudge* come out and we had all these PG-13 Japanese remakes, and just PG-13 horror in general. And now we have *Saw* and *Hostel*, and I don't want to put down *Saw* or *Hostel*, but we're going to be seeing tons of those types of movies. ... I didn't want to take people outside of the movie, because I do think everything comes from within the story. It's definitely not a spoof. It's not easy for people to necessarily understand what *Slither* is because there aren't a lot of movies out there like that now. Honestly, there have never been mainstream movies of this particular

genre, with the possible exception of *The Fly*, which was a hit.

*There's a lot of homage to those '80s movies in *Slither*. Who are you most drawing inspiration from?*

There's a few guys in particular that I'm indebted to, and that's John Carpenter, David Cronenberg, Frank Henenlotter, who did *Basket Case*, Stuart Gordon, the *Return of the Living Dead* guys, Brian Yuzna, not to mention Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson — what those guys did with their early films. So I think those were the guys I was looking to for inspiration, and I gave them subtle nods throughout the movie. Cronenberg in particular was a hero of mine growing up, and I've loved all of his movies, and in terms of a

particular film [influencing *Slither*] it would be *The Thing* by Carpenter.

Did the story change much from the way you conceived it to what's in theatres?

In the original script there were more mutations going on. The way the disease affects people, it starts in one place and it keeps growing and changing and mutating in different ways as it moves throughout the city, and right now, where the movie ends, it's actually nowhere near where the disease eventually goes to. It gets a lot worse, and I had a lot of those "next stages" in there, and for budgetary reasons we cut some of those stages out, but also just to simplify things a little bit, to make things a little more elegant because they were getting a little confusing. It's great, because if we do choose to do a sequel, which they're actually already bugging me about, there are other things in my head about where the disease goes and what happens.



Gregg Henry as infected mayor Jack MacReady.



Sitther: Worm-infected townies gorge themselves on raw meat, and (below) star Nathan Filion.

Aside from the aforementioned filmmakers, there seems to be a real over-the-top Troma influence at work. What did you learn during your days making movies for Uncle Lloyd? I was very fortunate that I went to work for Troma when I was in my early 20s and I was offered the opportunity to write a screenplay for \$150, which I did in two weeks, and it instantly got produced. A lot of my writer friends or my friends in film school would make fun of me, but they were paying \$80,000 to go to film school, and I was getting paid to work at Troma — very little — but I was getting paid. Everything about the practical side of making a movie from pre-production to casting to scouting through being able to direct, to work with cameras, to work with actors, to marketing, to putting a film in the theatre — I got to do all that stuff, and it's a very, very rare opportunity. I don't know where else I'd be able to do it, and I'm really grateful to Lloyd [Kaufman] that he gave me that opportunity. I was very aggressive at Troma too. The other employees used to make fun of me for my aggression and trying to take control of things all the time. Lloyd used to make fun of me [too], and I've had that problem on every movie I've ever worked on, which is I guess why I've always wanted to be a director.

You also got to cast the film. Why Nathan Filion as your lead?

We had seen a million Bill Pardy's; Nathan came in and read and I thought he was really good. I liked him in *Prey* and I really liked him as a person. This was way before *Serenity*, so I didn't know if he was gonna be able to carry the big screen. You just don't know until someone's given the lead in a movie, and Nathan had never done that, so I was unsure. We hired him, and from the first read-through it became so apparent that we could not have made a better

choice. And I've gotta admit, I'm sort of a fascist with my casting. This may be wrong, and I do it all the time, but I almost have a physical image in my head of what the characters look like, what they talk like, what they move like, and Nathan really fit the character of Bill Pardy.

OK, but Rooker? The guy known best as Henry in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* is an unlikely choice for the role of an upstanding small-town guy infected by malicious alien virus.

He's truly a cult idol that people haven't given enough attention to, so I thought he was just a great guy to cast in a movie, and he was a dream to work with. All that makeup at the end of the movie was agonizing, agonizing. And in some ways it was poorly designed because the guy was in agony up to seventeen, eighteen hours a day. There is no other actor in the world that would have put up with it. None. Nathan Filion's about the nicest guy — you can beat him up and spit on him and piss on him, and he doesn't give a shit, but there's no way he ever would've put up with the makeup. He would've been out of there in an hour. But Rooker, he had a rough childhood, he's been through a lot of pain in his life — he just goes to this Zen place. I have a fresky cat, and when I take my cat to the vet, my cat goes to this other place when he's at the vet. This cat is tough and he bites, but when he goes to the vet he just kind of zones out, goes to his special place, and you can do anything to him. That's what Rooker was like in that makeup.

Just how much goop did you cover the poor guy in?

The stuff that we used for the prosthetics, for the practical parasites, and all the stuff on Grant and his body is the

same stuff they use — I wish I could remember the name of the product — to make sex toys, and at one point we had used up the world's supply of this substance [laughs]. Honestly, we had it all; we had to call in to like Germany to get more; we had all of the stuff that was available in the entire world.

Although the film uses some CG, most of the effects are in-camera. How tough was it to bring the Grant-monster to life?

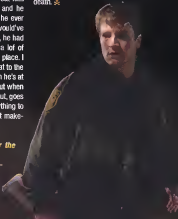
I think we had fourteen different puppeteers around doing different things. But the truth is I could've done it with a lot fewer because I really did have to take out all that stuff. It was an enormous waste of time. But I did want to get back to prosthetic effects. There have been a lot of technical advances in special effects that people don't know about these days that are easier to do than they were in the time of *The Thing*.

What's the grossest thing you made one of the Sitther cast do for the film?

The grossest thing is pretty simple: it was Tanya Saulnier, who plays Kylie Strutemyer, getting vomited on her face by her mother. That was my favourite moment in the whole movie.

Given all the flying fluids in *Sitther*, surely you had to make cuts for the MPAA.

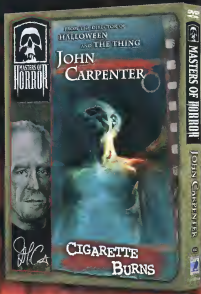
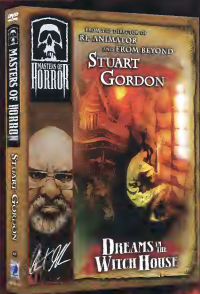
Believe it or not, we didn't, not a single thing. There were a couple of things I was like, "Uhhh they're not gonna let me get away with that," but no, we didn't [have to make edits]. We gave it to them and fully expected them to come back with cuts but there was not a single cut. I was really afraid, actually, of what I call the "Brenda rape scene", the scene where Grant infects Brenda with his tubusals because it's so violent and sexual and gross at the same time. Anything that's remotely violent and sexual I was afraid of, because in a lot of ways, that's what *Sitther* is, this disease that's basically fucking people to death. ☹





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EXHUMED FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE, THE BEAUTIFULLY
MORBID PHOTOGRAPHY OF CHAD MICHAEL WARD.

NECRO EROTICA

by Jovanka Vucković

There is a forbidden eroticism in dying. In death we are our most naked, uninhibited, and open, our bodies simplified to that which all of us secretly desire: capable flesh that will never say no. Of course, it's only the necrophiliac that wants it cold and clinical, but given mankind's bloody history and obsession with satisfying its loins at almost any price, it's almost natural that those fundamental taboos find themselves married in art – the only safehouse to really explore the prohibited. It is this perverse intercourse between sex and death, along with a fascination for medical procedures, that fuels the dark photography of Chad Michael Ward.

"I'm completely obsessed with erotica and death," Ward tells *Ave Morgue*. "So it seems nat-

ural to me to combine the two in my work. I was in high school when *Häuser* was released and I think that was really the beginning of my obsession with the combination of pleasure and pain, and sex and death as a joined thing."

Ward, appropriately a Clive Barker and David Cronenberg fan, began taking photographs in 2002 and quickly found himself shooting portraits for gloomy bands like Marilyn Manson, Fear Factory, Himsa and Gothead. After completing his first book of Gothic photography, titled *Black Rust*, in 2003, he started shooting images for his next volume, a sepia tone collection of necro-erotic female nudes called *Autopsyrotica* (available from digitalapocaltypse.com).

"Originally the book was going to focus on the-

ological things [like angels and demons]," Ward explains. "[But] I struggled with it right out of the gate and found myself producing art that had a more 'death' tilt to it ... the book became my ode to the two primary forces in my life: sex and death."

Since its publication last March, Ward has been working on a sequel to *Autopsyrotica* – another book of unsettling erotic portraits, this time in colour with more of a medical theme. He reveals: "The first book was exploring the beginning and ending of our life cycle; the sequel is more about falling in love with the dead. It's a zombie love story, really."

Both books are similar in that they were shot almost entirely in Ward's studio and digitally



manipulated in Photoshop – as opposed to his next project, *The Pain Box*, which is being shot entirely in-camera and on location (at the Linda Vista Hospital, a favourite Hollywood location in downtown Los Angeles where Rob Zombie shot the Dr. Satan scene in *House of 1000 Corpses*).

"The primary rule [for *The Pain Box*] was that the imagery had to be all done in the camera," he says. "This meant that, other than color correction, I couldn't manipulate the photography in any other way. I also wanted to see if I had what it took to direct a crew of people on a fairly large-scale project."

Advance images from the *Pain Box* shoot released on his website led Ward to several gigs on the sets of music videos, including directing Dragonlord's Untitled The End video, and art direction for Marilyn Manson and The Rasmus, plus production design on a film called *The Gene Generation*, the first feature from award-winning short film director Peary Reginald Teo (*Children of the Arcane*). Because of the expense involved in the 30-person shoot, *The Pain Box* will likely not see publication until sometime in 2007, but in the meantime Ward has taken the next step into filmmaking with a finished script for a horror film he plans to shoot this year.

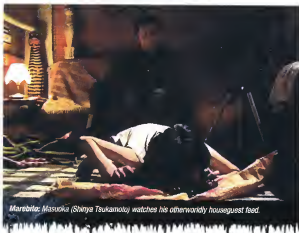
"I've been fascinated with dark, scary things for as long as I can remember," he says of his interest in genre filmmaking. "I think it's the visceralness of it, it's something that caters to my obsession with death and the beauty in brutality." ☼

"I'M COMPLETELY OBSESSED WITH EROTICA AND DEATH, SO IT SEEMS NATURAL TO ME TO COMBINE THE TWO IN MY WORK." Chad Michael Ward



Strange stills (clockwise from left): Two photographs from *The Pain Box* shoot, a still from *The Rasmus* video, and a portrait from *Autopsyrotica*.

CINEMACABRE



Marebito: Masuoka (Shinya Tsukamoto) watches his otherworldly houseguest feed.

LOVECRAFT, ASIAN-STYLE

MAREBITO

Starring Shinya Tsukamoto,
Tomomi Miyashita and Kazuhiro Nakahara
Directed by Takashi Shimizu
Written by Chiaki Konaka
Tartan Films

Quick: how many Takashi Shimizus does it take to screw in a light bulb? Easy: just one, but he'll do it over and over and over again. The joke is that as of this year the Japanese filmmaker will have made seven versions – remakes and sequels for both Asian and North American markets – of his J-horror staple *Ju-On* (*The Grudge*).

So it's either completely appropriate or totally ironic that Shimizu should also be responsible for *Marebito*, a highly original work that ignores the J-horror clichés of pesty long-haired ghosts popping out of the woodwork. Instead, it blends *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell's 1960 masterpiece of

murderous voyeurism) with Lovecraft for a terrifying trip into the uncanny.

The journey begins with freelance cameraman Masuoka (acclaimed Japanese filmmaker Shinya Tsukamoto, *RMH45*) recording a bloody suicide in an underground passageway. The event triggers an obsession that leads him deep into the Tokyo underground, beneath utility pipes, down spiral staircases, through pre-war tunnels, and past a crazed homeless man who warns him of DEROs (Detrimental Robots), the humanoid critters Masuoka glimpses in the corridors – or are they just in his mind?

With his camera lighting the way, he edges closer to a Lovecraftian underworld, all the while grappling with his own fears by waxing philosophical through a Lovecraft-style narration. Once at the bottom, he discovers someone, or more accurately something, that's both monstrous and arousing, dangerous and fragile. He brings the creature to the surface, and uses the camera to further probe his own, and his guest's, fears and desires – with murderous consequences.



Although the film still has a few surprises in store, it drags a bit and becomes confusing as the narrative becomes more surreal than the landscape. Screenwriter Chiaki Konaka, who adapted the story from his novel, leaves a lot to digest, notably the unexplained DEROs and a conspiracy involving a silly-looking guy in a trench coat.

The film's self-indulgence becomes weary on repeat viewing, but it's still a must-see, both for its chilling and original Lovecraftian approach to horror voyeurism, and because Shimizu – no longer a one-trick pony – shot this incredibly ambitious work in an astonishing eight days. The key is to allow yourself to sink into *Marebito*'s murky madness. As its tortured protagonist says, "It doesn't matter if I've lost my mind, but I want to stay sane long enough to recognize the terror."

David Alexander

THIRD TIME'S THE HARM

FINAL DESTINATION 3

Starring Mary Elizabeth Winstead,
Ryan Merriman and Amanda Crew
Directed by James Wong
Written by Glen Morgan and James Wong
New Line Cinema

Final Destination isn't really a series of films so much as it's a business model. Each one of these movies is the exact same story told again and again, but ironically they might just make for the wittiest horror franchise around, as they openly ignore genre clichés and treat their generic teen cast with as much cynicism as they deserve. You don't watch the series for plot and character development, you watch it for the thrill of seeing teenagers succumb to bloody fantastic, Rube Goldbergesque device-death sequences. Thankfully, *Final Destination 3* provides nothing less.

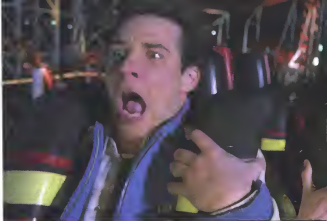
Like the first two films, this one wastes no time setting up its premise. As she's about to get on a roller coaster, Wendy (Winstead) has a premonition of a terrible disaster about to befall everyone involved. She freaks out, causing several others to get off the ride before said disaster occurs. But in cheating death, they've only prolonged the inevitable,

and each obnoxious character eventually succumbs to bizarre, darkly hilarious accidents — this time involving tanning beds, a weight room and a hardware store where nearly everything in the building potentially is a lethal weapon.

A *Final Destination* movie should only be judged based on the inventiveness of the kills, so it's disappointing that the opening roller coaster sequence provides little more than some CGI smash-ups, unlike the apocalyptic plane crash and mud-shattering highway pile-up of the previous films. Since this is the third time in six years that we've seen this exact same storyline, the deaths are starting to become a tad predictable, but the team of Glen Morgan and James Wong (who helmed the original but not part two) still manage to create some gleefully sick scenes. Mercifully, they keep to a minimum the tired, contrived and overly-intricate hypothesizing on death's design that audiences don't care that much about anyway.

No doubt Morgan and Wong, best known for their work on *The X-Files*, could use their talents on better things than the *Final Destination* movies, but with the kind of returns these things bring, who could blame them for taking on a sure thing? Whether the series can keep up its reputation remains to be seen, but given that it pretty much recouped its production budget opening weekend, rest assured there's nothing final about this particular entry.

Aaron Lapson



Final Destination 3: Despite some predictable kills, still a worthy entry in the FD franchise.

with generous helpings of karo syrup, almost makes up for the deficiencies in the script, casting and direction. And somehow, the final product, however improbable, is pretty damned entertaining.

Dewan plays Tamara, a plain and unpopular high-school student who finds solace from the cruelty of her classmates and single father in daydreams about her bunky teacher Mr. Natolly (Marsden) and, um, black magic. Bullied by the cool kids, especially the toxic Kisha (Melissa Elias), Tamara's only defender is good girl Chloe (Lindsay Lohan clone Stuart). When Tamara's newspaper exposé on steroid use among school athletes gets Kisha's asshole jock boyfriend Shawn (Patrick Clark) suspended from the team, you just know that the resulting prank, designed to humiliate Tamara by unmasking

her love for Mr. Natolly, will instead result in her death.

The movie's untimely end binds together the conspirators (including Shawn, Kisha and Chloe), and they bury Tamara in a shallow grave. Guilt gnaws at them until Tamara, now transformed into a bona fide honeysucking hottie, inexplicably struts back into class. Suddenly, their guilt is replaced by fear. The new Tamara is sexy, confident, strong, and out for revenge — a dash she serves ice cold.

Tamara's influences, the aforementioned *Carrie* (1976) and *The Craft* (1996), are obvious, and while the film never achieves the poignancy of the former or the entertainment value of the latter, the amalgam of those influences, with a touch of *River's Edge* (1986), comes off as halfway original. Gorehounds will also appreciate the severed ears and tongues, as well as some convincing corpse makeup.



A COLD DISH SERVES REVENGE

TAMARA

Starring Jenna Dewan, Katie Stuart
and Matthew Marsden
Directed by Jeremy Haft
Written by Jeffrey Paddick
Maple Pictures

As a cinematic sister to *Carrie* (its most obvious influence), *Tamara* invokes the pain and terror of adolescence with all the subtlety and depth of an after-school special. The charisma of star Jenna Dewan, combined

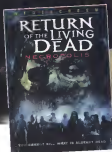
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Return of the Living Dead 4: Necropolis: A zombie series in full rigor

But the film rests on Dewan's shoulders, and she proves herself more than capable. The pre-hottie Tamara is insecure, self-conscious and not entirely likeable; after death, she's calculating, seductive and bodaciously sexy. It's hardly a Meryl Streep-calibre performance, but Dewan, 25, makes it work, even when her dialogue verges on the cliché. Carrie would (almost) be proud.

Sean Plummer

PARTY'S OVER

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 4: NECROPOLIS

Starring Arneo-Lynn Chadwick, Cory Hardict and John Koebe
Directed by Elory Elkayem
Written by William Butler and Aaron Strongoni
Lions Gate

For a 1985 horror-comedy with a wacky ensemble cast and dated music, Dan O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* holds up remarkably well. From Linnea Quigley's naked graveyard romp, to the Bernice Wrightson-designed shiny Tarman, to 45 Grave's Do You Wanna Party? laid over the awesome visage of zombies clawing for solid ground in the Resurrection Cemetery (itself a whimsy of *Wacko Jacko's Thriller*), *RotD* is still one of the best zombie talkies this side of

Romero. But when it comes to the sequels that followed it, the law of diminishing returns is in full rigor by the time we get to *Return of the Living Dead 4: Necropolis*.

Directed by Elory Elkayem (*Eight Legged Freaks*), it features scientist Charles Garrison (Peter Coyote) travelling to Chernobyl to collect the remaining canisters of Trioxin 5 (a recompound of O'Bannon's Trioxin 245) from some terribly dubbed Russian mobsters for use in the homeland defense research division of an American chemical company called Hybra Tech. After the doc reanimates a severed arm and an entire mohawked punk rocker, the gas leaks into the sewers, where it infects two homeless guys and a BBQ'd rat.

Garrison's nephew Cody (Hardict), along with his pudgy younger brother and their dirt-biking teenage super-friends, launch an expedition to find out what happened to their dead pal Zeke after his body is spotted at Hybra Tech by one of their buddies working third shift at the company. What follows is a *Scooby Doo*-meets-

The A-Team-level infiltration that leads them to Cody's parents, who apparently died in an "accident" at the company one year prior and have now been transformed into untoppable Borg-look-alike "über zombies" – brain-eaters quickly dispatched via simple hand grenade.

Besides one decent head-crushing, *Return of the Living Dead 4: Necropolis* is unwatchable and mindnumbingly stupid, rivalling *Day of the Dead*, *Contagion* for the most inexcusable misuse of a zombie franchise name. On second thought, that title just may be usurped by Elkayem's fifth installment in the series, *Return of the Living Dead 5: Rave to the Grave*, out on home video this October.

Jovanka Vuckovic

CUT THE STRINGS ALREADY!

PUPPET MASTER VS. DEMONIC TOYS

Starring Corey Feldman, Vanessa Angel and Silvia Savatova

Directed by Ted Nicolaou

Written by C. Courtney Joyner and Ted Nicolaou
Anchor Bay

I'll wager that more than a few barroom arguments have been settled by the likes of *Alien Vs. Predator*, *Freddy Vs. Jason* and even *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, but I can't imagine anyone has ever had a drunken dispute over the potential outcome of this particular match-up. The long-promised *Puppet Master vs. Demonic Toys* finally pits Full Moon's barely respectable *Puppet Master* and *Demonic Toys* franchises against each other in a pint-sized battle royale with only one certain outcome: whoever wins, we still have to stomach Corey Feldman for 90 minutes.

The ninth installment in the *Puppet Master* series has Andre Toulon's great, great grand-nephew Robert (Feldman) working on a serum to reanimate his family's collection of killer marionettes. The secret formula is stolen by the demon-worshipping Erica Sharpe (Angel), current head of Sharpe Industries, who has plans to awaken carbon copies of her *Demonic Toys* – Baby Oopsy



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Puppet Master Vs. Demonic Toys: Two franchises coming together for total failure.

Daisy, Grizzly, and Jack-in-the-Box – for a Christmas morning of carnage. When Robert's daughter is kidnapped for Erica's evil ceremony, it's up to Blade, Six Shooter, Pinhead and Jester to put a stop to Sharpe Industries once and for all – or at least until the next sequel.

I never thought it would be possible for anyone to under-deliver on a *Puppet Master vs. Demonic Toys* movie, but writer/director Ted Nicolaou gets so caught up in his industrial espionage plot that he barely remembers to include the killer puppets. Instead, *PMvDT* is more of a battle of bad acting waged between ex-*Baywatch* star Angel and terminal has-been Feldman, who seems determined to make his *whiny* appearance on *The Surreal Life* a professional high point on his resume. With talcum powder brushed into his hair and a raspy voice to shrewdly propel him beyond his 30-odd years, Feldman's neurotic, forever mumbling chemist/puppeteer is strictly a one-trick pony with a couple of broken legs. Yup, time to cut the strings on these increasingly embarrassing franchises.

Paul Corupe

PASS ON THE TISSUES

TEARS OF KALI

Starring Jandira Irena-Hellana, Mathieu Carrière
and Michael Balaun
Written and directed by Andreas Marschall
Revolver Entertainment

There's a lot of skill on display in *Tears of Kali*, an innovative and interesting plot line, compelling gore, grotesque imagery, and sustained periods of tension and confusion that mirror the characters' altered mental states. The trick is untangling those promising stretches from the film's art-school posturing, pseudo-philosophical noodling, and quite possibly the worst English-language dub job since *Son of God* (there is no English subtitles option on the DVD).

The story flickers onto the screen with a jarring series of claustrophobic shots of a New Age commune gone terribly wrong in India in the 1980s. Inside, emaciated Western spiritual seekers lie sweating and raving on makeshift beds. A woman rises from her nest of blankets and obeying – perhaps a ted



literally – her guru's command to look beyond herself to the beauty of the world outside, she snips off her eyelids with a pair of sewing scissors. So ends our introduction to the Taylor-Eriksson group, a fictional cult that fuses radical psychotherapy with Hindu theology and meditation techniques.

From there *Kali* splinters into three stories, each focusing on a character directly or indirectly related to the now-defunct cult. The first entry is a lumpy porridge of expository dialogue, annoying flashbacks and a few shocking scenes that, when pieced together by the frustrated viewer, turn out to be a fairly sophisticated examination of the skewed loyalties and machinations of a Taylor-Eriksson splinter group.

The second story is the best and features one of the most twisted psychiatrists since Hannibal Lecter. Here rookie German director Andreas Marschall lays off the philosophy and simply lets the gladiator-like battle of wills between doctor and patient spin into a perverse psychodrama. And lastly, the closing tale is an effective but not particularly memorable story of a faith healer who seemingly lifts a curse from one of the cult's former members.

The surreal ending sequence, which follows the lidless woman's journey beyond the commune walls, makes a nod at tying the film's frayed threads into something resembling a cohesive story, but it's too little too late. The nicest thing to say about *Tears of Kali* is that it will probably leave viewers curious about what Marschall will get up to with his next film.

James Grainger

BOLL-FREE BANALITY

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2: DEAD AIM

Starring Emmanuelle Vaugier, Ed Quinn
and Victoria Pratt
Directed by Michael Hurst
Written by Mark A. Altman, Michael Roesch
and Peter Schreier
Maple Pictures

I don't have ADD and I am not a complete idiot, so needless to say I wasn't a fan of the original *House of the Dead*, and when I slipped this movie into my DVD player I knew I was going to regret it for many reasons.

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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE HOLLERS FOR A DOLLAR!

SORORITY SUCKERS

BLOOD SISTERS

Razer Digital

What's this, a 3-D movie about hot vampire babes who lure coeds and female strippers to their sorority house for a fangy breakfast? You had me at 3-D! Seeing Phoebe Dollar (*Goth, Hell's Highway*) bounce around in a thong is just an added bonus. When an intrepid young journalism student at Dunwich University tracks a rash of student deaths to an exclusive vampire sorority, she must go undercover — and under the covers, of course — to expose the sexy sisters and their sticky den of iniquity. Don't expect any stellar performances from a cast that would look more at home in a low-rent porno, but if blood, babes and boobs (glorious 3Ds in 3-D!) are more your speed, then this is the film for you.

Body Count: 10

Phoebe's Best Line: "Naughty boy! I'll give you something to scream about!"

PHOEBE VS. PSEUDO-PREDATOR

ALIEN 3000

Maple Pictures

Stop me if you've heard this before: a group of mercenaries are hired to investigate some brutal murders in the countryside but wind up being hunted by an invisible alien that bleeds green goo when wounded. Sound familiar? *Alien 3000* (a.k.a. *Unseen Evil 2*) has been packaged with an alien on the cover that doesn't even appear in the movie (it's actually from the film *Breeder*) in the hopes of confusing people into thinking that they might be renting a half-decent flick à la Roger Corman's *Gateway of Terror*. The saving grace is Phoebe Dollar prancing about the countryside in tight black jeans and high-heeled boots, toting a shotgun and fighting a horribly-rendered CGI alien in hopes of saving her life... and maybe her career.

Body Count: 20

Phoebe's Best Line: "Go fuck a squirrel, nature-boy!"

MORE BUXOM THAN BRONSON

CHARLIE'S DEATH WISH

A Vital Fluid Release

When her sister is killed in a prison cell while awaiting bail, Charlie (Dollar) takes matters into her own capable stripper hands, and soon the streets of Hollywood are twinkling with gore. Sharing both title and plot from *Death Wish*, Charlie's *Death Wish* has Dollar blowing away suspects with everything from a rocket launcher to a crossbow. She clocks in a solid performance, along with Ron Jeremy as the cop forced to track her down, plus there are memorable cameos from Motorhead's Lemmy, Guns N' Roses' Dizzy Reed and Tracii Guns of L.A. Guns. Having Ron, Lemmy and Dizzy starring together in a movie is a lot like eating a three-course McDonalds meal with silverware and a linen napkin — still crappy, but strangely gratifying.

Body Count: 31 (+ 2 dogs)

Phoebe's Best Line: "Kiss my dead sister's black cat's ass!"

44 BLUE MORGUE



sons, the least of which being that it's a sequel to a fricken' Uwe Boll movie.

For the morbidly curious, the plot has a mad scientist, played by Sid Haig (*Spider Baby, The Devil's Rejects*), unleashing a zombie plague on a university campus. Twenty-nine days later (?), the government finally sends in a crack squad of Special Forces commandos. And by crack squad, I mean that they must have been doing crack 'cause they're the worst soldiers ever. When they rush in to secure a blood sample of the original infected zombie (in order to try to create a vaccine) they find themselves at the wrong end of an undead ass-kicking. Racing to complete the mission before cruise missiles flatten the area, they actually succeed in getting the sample, but then lose it, go back in and get it again, then lose it again. Yep, crack commandos.

Though a better film than the original (like that's hard to pull off), it suffers from Hurst's lackluster direction, repetitive fight sequences, lame dialogue and laughable situations — like a soldier wiping the blood of a dead zombie into his own mouth, or the squad being stymied by a simple ventilation grate. The zombies are reminiscent of those featured in Romero's *City of the Dead* and the gore, while plentiful, is unimaginative. But at least this time the filmmakers didn't insert the *Matrix*-style bullet time collages and scenes from the *HotD* video game that made the original so unwatchable.

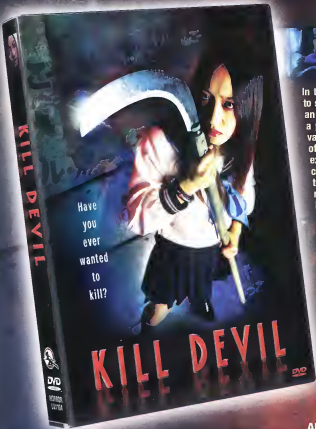
And just as I was about to give up completely on this one, they had the balls to film a half-decent ending with a panoramic view of the city burning while the infection runs rampant. Did they do that in the hopes of a sequel? You bet your T-cells.

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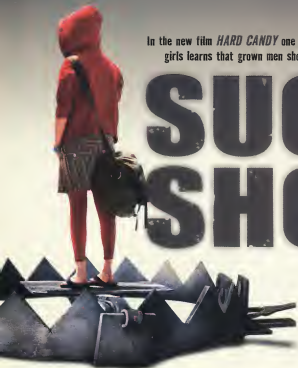
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In the new film *HARD CANDY* one predator with a sweet tooth for underage girls learns that grown men should *never* take candy from strangers.

SUGAR SHOCK

by STUART ANDREWS



On April 14th Lions Gate will unleash a movie destined to be remembered for a scene so deliciously demented it makes all of the Achilles' heel hellishness administered in Takashi Miike's *Audition* seem like a pedicure. And if that isn't impressive enough, the soon-to-be-infamous movie moment contains absolutely no onscreen violence, relying instead on an implied trauma guaranteed to give every male audience member an unbearably uncomfortable feeling in the lower regions.

The film in question is *Hard Candy*, the sordid tale of a 32-year-old man who has a rendezvous with a fourteen-year-old girl he meets in an internet chat room. Unfortunately, that's pretty much where a responsible synopsis has to end because as soon as this basic premise is established, the film begins a gripping streak of cleverly executed, sharp left turns into a relentless spiral of torment and torture.

Not exactly a horror film per se, *Hard Candy* is more a strange convulsion of genres that may best be described as a dark thriller with perverse tentacles that poke into the horror realm. Even the filmmaker himself is at a loss to nail down exactly which genre it belongs to.

"If I knew, I'd be able to tell you and it would make the marketing people's lives easier," first-time feature director David Slade admits. "It doesn't follow any rules but the risk you take when you go and break a bunch of rules is that nobody can categorize your film afterwards and thus you get marketing people scratching their heads like monkeys. So you get dropped into a horror bracket, which we could fit into, or a suspense bracket, which we could fit into, but it's really many different types of films all in one."

But the associations to *Audition* are unavoidable and are already rampant on the internet. It's a comparison that Slade himself is not overly enthusiastic about: "I'm a big fan of Miike but this is a totally different film from the ground up. There is absolutely no real comparison between the two except for the obvious antagonistic relationship between a male and a female character, and the fact that both films go to extremes."

Slade, who's spent the last few years directing music videos and commercials for Ridley Scott's production company, was on the lookout for a feature film project and was getting progressively discouraged by all the mindless dreck coming his way until his manager handed him the original script by TV writer Brian Nelson. "It was just

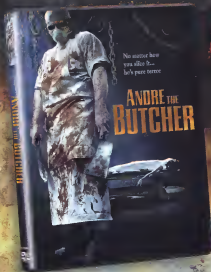
phenomenal," he explains, "I couldn't stop reading it. I read it from cover to cover without pausing. It makes you align with two different characters, both of which are morally questionable. You take sides and then swap sides and then take sides again. It was the kind of film I wanted to make, particularly growing up and being fed a diet of Nicolas Roeg and films from the '70s, which generally have a lot more to say than films today, at least on a subtextual level."

Slade's laud pacing and stylized execution preserves and translates to screen the page-turning properties of Nelson's crystalline script, but it is a couple of truly outstanding performances that enable *Hard Candy* to motor along at its frenetic pace. Actor Patrick Wilson (Joel Schumacher's *Phantom of the Opera*) creates a completely despicable character—a creepy pedophile—who strangely manages to emerge as almost likeable and ultimately sympathetic. But the real showstopper here is Ellen Page, a young Canadian actor who was only seventeen at the time of filming. With a truly compelling and fiercely intelligent performance, Page seems poised to emerge as a major acting talent.

For his next project, Slade will once again collaborate with writer Nelson on a screen adaptation of Steve Niles' widely acclaimed graphic novel *30 Days of Night*. He promises a film just as unyielding as *Hard Candy*, but more genre-focused.

"There's a lot more viciousness in our script at the moment than in *TempleSmith* and Niles' graphic novel. But the last thing I'm going to say about the project is that what we're trying to do with it is make a horror movie. Not an action movie." ☞

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When news breaks that the lead singer of *The Choke* is going solo, their last gig promises to be packed with bad feelings...and murder. The band and their entourage mysteriously find themselves trapped in an old meat-packing plant that is now Club 905. But the tension turns into real panic when the body of a red-hot groupie turns up mutilated in a meat locker. Now the group recognizes that they are trapped with a vicious killer.

DVD FEATURES

- Commentary with the Director and Crew
- Trailer Gallery
- SPANISH SUBTITLES
- 5.1 Surround / 2.0 Stereo
- 16:9 Anamorphic
- The Choke: The Legend Begins Featurette

Picture Size: 16:9 Aspect Ratio: 1.78:1



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R
Violence, language
and some sexuality

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INDIE TERROR FEST!

BY STUART ANDREWS

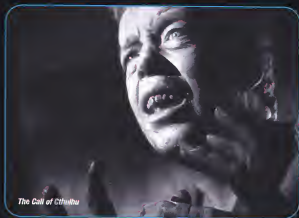
THIS INSTALLMENT: *THE CALL OF CTHULHU*, THE MOST AUTHENTIC H.P. LOVECRAFT ADAPTATION TO DATE.

Take a look at just about any book, video or course claiming to offer instruction to ultra low-budget filmmakers and one of the standard pieces of advice you're likely to encounter is the importance of writing within your budget and means. Thankfully, however, American indie auteurs Andrew Leman and Sean Branney had the complete audacity to brazenly disregard this when they embarked upon the hugely ambitious project of cinematically adapting H.P. Lovecraft's seminal work, *The Call of Cthulhu* — a story widely considered to be untranslatable to the screen, regardless of available budget.

But director Leman and producer Branney are not your average enthusiasts, they're an obsessive breed of Lovecraftian nerds of the highest order. As founders and organizers of the H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society (HPLHS), an online organization dedicated to live-action role-playing games and publishing historical articles about the author himself, Leman and Branney set out to create the most authentic H.P. Lovecraft adaptation to date.

"The thing about Lovecraft that I find compelling is the concept of insanity and constantly questioning what is real about the situation," Leman tells *Rue Morgue*. "Walking that fine line between sane and insane is very not dramatic territory. His world sets my imagination on fire because of the creatures he created and the alternate history of the world. You can take that in so many different directions if you like: you can create gigantic stories from it and you can create very small stories from it. It's really an incredibly empowering set of ideas to work with as an artistic creator."

The Call of Cthulhu is an intensely complicated narrative-within-a-narrative that details one man's obsession with the cult of the Old One, Cthulhu. It takes place over the course of a number of years in numerous locations on a couple of different continents and features a massive array of characters along with boats on the open ocean, and even a giant monster. In addition, because the story was written in 1926, the filmmakers decided the silent film aesthetic would



The Call of Cthulhu

be the most faithful approach and digitally altered their footage to resemble an old, scratchy silent film print — a process they call Mythoscope.

"I would say that doing the boats was one of the most significant challenges from a production point of view," Leman explains. "We decided to go with a very stylized approach that was in keeping with the 1920s cinema look. We realized that no one's ever going to be fooled into thinking that this is a real boat or the real ocean but that's okay. I want them to know it's a model. I just want them to think that it's a really cool model."

With elaborately constructed German Expressionism-inspired sets (including various reconstructions of the sunken city of R'lyeh which took over a year to make), stunning cinematography and even a stop-motion animated Cthulhu monster, Leman and Branney demonstrate that with talent, a dedicated cast and crew and an immense amount of resourcefulness, serious limitations in

budget can be effectively overcome.

With its genuine, roll-up-the-sleeves approach, *The Call of Cthulhu* should serve as an inspiration to all no-budget filmmakers who've been hideously conned into dreaming too small. This is a real testament to the glory of handmade cinema and showcases exactly what's possible when filmmakers are as intensely passionate and obsessed with their subject material as Leman and company. And although not every single aspect of the film is realized with utmost success, its sheer ambition is staggering.

Not satisfied to rest on the laurels of this production, the HPLHS society is already set to embark upon another Lovecraftian adventure, Leman explains: "We're developing *The Whisperer in the Darkness*; it's about the Mi-Go, the Fungi from Yuggoth. It's set in Vermont and is also going to be in Mythoscope. Like *The Call of Cthulhu*, it will be a black and white film and look like it's from the 1930s but it will have dialogue. We're stepping forward and making a table this time."

The Call of Cthulhu is self-distributed by the HPLHS and is available through their website at cthulhulves.org.





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REISSUES



Gorgo: The Godzilla-like monster terrorizes London.

GODZILLA'S ENGLISH COUSIN

GORG0 (1961)

Starring Bill Travers, William Sylvester and Vincent Winter
Directed by Eugène Lourié
Written by Robert L. Richards and Daniel James VCI

What is it about the giant monster film that makes audiences clamour for the simulated destruction of their homeland on the silver screen? In the 1950s and '60s, nation-crumbling creatures began to wreak havoc all over the globe — *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* pulverized Coney Island, *Godzilla* smashed up Tokyo, *Reptilus* decimated Copenhagen, and *Kong* ripped up the Korean countryside. With *Gorgo*, veteran Western kaiju director Eugène Lourié brings the proud tradition of model city stomping across the pond, as Brits get their chance to see London's best-known monuments turned to mince-meat by



a rampaging super-lizard.

Borrowing from *Godzilla* by way of *Kong*, *Gorgo* gets things rolling with an undersea earthquake off the coast of Ireland that coughs up the titular beast from his underwater slumber. He's promptly captured by a pair of sailors (Travers and Sylvester) and sold to a London circus. But when *Gorgo*'s even bigger mother finds her offspring missing, she levels London Bridge, the Tower of London and Big Ben, all while being attacked by a diligent stock footage army.

After several celebrated collaborations with stop-motion master Ray Harryhausen, including *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, Lourié's first foray into the realm of the rubber suit still manages to feature some truly exceptional miniature effects. The last twenty minutes of *Gorgo* delivers all the mini-destruction you could ever want — the attention to detail on the London cityscapes is impressive, and it's truly thrilling to watch the city's famous tourist attractions reduced to rubble. These giant monster movie delights go a long way

in making up for the fact that when the marauding sea creatures are not on screen, *Gorgo* is deadily dull. Surrounded by cookie-cutter scientists and military men embroiled in a talky and ultimately superfluous subplot, it soon becomes clear that *Gorgo* is the only character in the film that the screenwriters bothered to develop.

Despite the addition of a ten-minute behind-the-scenes documentary, VCI's DVD isn't particularly impressive, with spotty sound quality and a washed-out Technicolor transfer. Regardless, *Gorgo*'s monstrously fun special effects and amazingly realized demolition scenes make it one of the better non-Japanese kaiju rubber-suit films, and a must for fans of large-scale destruction.

Paul Corupe

FOR FRANCOPHILES ONLY

NIGHT OF THE SKULL (1976)

Starring William Berger, Lina Romay and Evelynne Scott
Directed By Jesus Franco
Written by Jesus Franco and Edgar Allan Poe
Image Entertainment



Rabid readers of *Rue Morgue* are undoubtedly aware of this critic's soft spot for the frequently lazy, occasionally brilliant, insanely prolific Eurotrash exploitation pioneer Jess Franco. His zoom-happy, multi-pseudo-mythologized body of work is as fascinating as it is erratic, and in his finest hours — the dreamy *Awful Dr. Orloff*, the trippy *Venus in Furs*, the languidly sexual *Hungry for Lesbos* — he combines violence and eroticism better than any of his peers. However, for every *She Killed in Ecstasy* (good), Franco spat out a dozen *Revenge in the House of Usher* (bad... very bad!). Image's latest release of the long-unseen Spanish giallo *Night of the Skull* (a.k.a. *La noche de los cráneos*, *Suspense*) leans more towards the latter.

After a weird opening credit sequence that seems to be a "greatest hits" of the carnage to come, we settle into *Night of the Skull*'s apparently Poe-plundered plot (though the connection is tenuous at best). The murder of Lord Archibald Manion by a really creepy skull-masked black-glove killer (the film's best asset) sets in motion both a cutthroat familial battle for his estate, and a spate of increasingly lurid, creative deaths. Scotland Yard (more like Spanish Yard, but I digress) is called in to stop the killings and unravel

the apparently money-motivated mystery before it's too late.

Night of the Skull is competently made (translation: it's in focus) but the film is too talky and almost completely uninvolved. More distressingly, Franco's trademark voyeuristic sense of sleaze (which elevates even his most dire works) is nowhere to be seen. Even usually game Franco co-conspirator (and eventual life partner) Lina Romay keeps her knickers (mostly) on, and though unrated, the whole snoozy affair never strays beyond PG.

That said, Franco's work often existed in different cuts, the tamest of which were prepared for Spanish audiences, so perhaps there's a nastier version out there somewhere. Image's DVD says the release date for this refreshingly subtitled wannabe shocker is 1976, but it feels older, and curiously the menus are completely in Spanish. Definitely worth a look for Francoian completists but a waste of 82 minutes for anyone else.

Chris Alexander

VENTRILLOISM FOR DUMMIES

MAGIC (1976)

Starring Anthony Hopkins, Ann-Margret and Burgess Meredith
Directed by Richard Attenborough
Written by William Goldman
Dark Sky Films

"Classic" is a term we tend to bestow rather recklessly on films we haven't seen in a while, especially if they have the right names attached. The front-and-centre presence of the mighty, mighty Sir Anthony Hopkins in *Magic*, for instance, is likely to push many sentimental buttons, as are the superb supporting cast and the behind-the-camera firepower of lauded director Richard Attenborough (*A Bridge Too Far*) and writer William Goldman (*The Stepford Wives*, 1975) – especially given an emotional buffer zone of nearly three decades. *Magic* does, alas, fall short of classic status under closer present-day scrutiny, but there's still plenty to recommend it.

Hopkins vividly essays Corky Withers, a dejected second-rate nightclub magician who finds sudden success after introducing a hilariously foul-mouthed ventriloquist dummy named Fats into his act. As his newly unleashed alter ego propels them both up the showbiz ladder, Corky takes a breather at an upstate New York tourist

cabin that just happens to be owned by his high-school crush (Ann-Margret, or "Margrook" for you *Flinstones* purists) and her lunkhead husband. Sparks fly, clothes are shed, orgasms are had, tension mounts, all while Fats grows increasingly impatient and jealous. If what follows is largely predictable – the hoary old who's-controlling-who premise – it's all made palatable by the staggering talents on both sides of the lens.

Corky's steady unravelling is a slow-motion personality car crash you can't help but gawk at, and while I honestly can't remember seeing Hopkins chew so much scenery in any other film (his Hannibal Lecter turns are positively restrained by comparison), he's infinitely more compelling to watch overacting than any other Brit performer of his vintage. (For instance, one fairly shudders to imagine Richard "Thespian Hernia" Harris in this role.)

Dark Sky's reissue looks good and they toss in some cool extras, the highlight being Hopkins detailing his preparation to play a ventriloquist. Sadly, though, there's no commentary from Fats.

John W. Bowen



Magic: A young Anthony Hopkins and "Fats".

EURO ZIPPER-RIPPER

SATAN'S BLOOD (1977)

Starring Angel Aranda, Sandra Alberti and Mariana Karr
Written and directed by Carlos Puerto
Mondo Macabro

After the fall of Franco (the general, not the Jess), Spain's cinematic censorial belt didn't just loosen up... it freakin' fell off! Hence, there were a slew of saucy '70s sex

pictures that freely indulged in graphic grue and carnality – the pinnacle (or nadir, depending on your POV) of which was arguably Carlos Puerto's terminally sleazy *Escalafrio*, known to us Anglos as *Satan's Blood*.

A happy couple, Andy and Thelma go for a Sunday drive with their cute dog and cross paths with another couple, swingers Anne and Bruno. Bruno claims he knows Andy and, embarrassed by his ignorance, Andy goes along with the charade.

Suddenly a savage storm hits, and the befuddled yet intrigued pair become houseguests at Bruno and Anne's impossibly huge mansion. After some ouija board shenanigans and a near rape, the four of them engage in a



Satan's Blood: A breathless mix of art and exploitation.

pretty intense satanic orgy (This almost never happens to me...). Turns out the kinky hosts aren't just looking to play evil board games and get laid; their motives and machinations are far more sinister, and needless to say, things get messy.

Released in 1977, the same year as Argentina's quintessential horror head-trip *Suspense*, *Satan's Blood* doesn't quite work on the same level as that masterpiece but it is just as breathlessly bizarre. The film was produced by future *Pieces and Shags* (sounds like a snack!) hack, or, auteur Juan Piquer Simón, and his trademark love for all things gruesome and voyeuristic oozes through. That said, though, there is a level of genuine cinema on display here, a lyrical sense of dread that endlessly wrestles with the eye-popping exploitation elements for screen supremacy. As a matter of fact, the film was the first to receive an "S" rating for sex.

Unfortunately, Puerto has pretty much fallen off the earth and wasn't available to supply this beautiful new DVD release with a commentary or at the very least an interview. Mondo Macabro compensates with its usual assortment of trailers, historical info and a wonderful mini-doc on Satanism.

Satan's Blood is an important, delicious little zapper-ripper that gleefully delivers the naughty goods. Check it out, you perv!

Chris Alexander

THERE'S NOTHING ON TV

POLTERGEIST: THE LEGACY: SEASON ONE (1996)

Starring Derek de Lint, Martin Cummins, Helen Shaver et. al
Directed by Allan Eastman, Stuart Gillard, Ken Grotti et. al
Written by Richard Barton Lewis, Robert Masello, Frederick Rappaport et al
MGM

In a nutshell, *Poltergeist: The Legacy* is all well and good if you like that sort of thing. Me, I could live without it, and it's my sworn duty to tell you why in 400 words or less. If you're unfamiliar with the TV series, as I was before trudging through this five-disc set, it has absolutely zero to do with Tobe Hooper's fine (if surprisingly non-violent) 1982 film or its unspeakably lame sequels.

A pre-credits title crawl sets up the half-assed *Buffy/X-Files* back story, and please

bear in mind that the following technical errors are not my own: "Since the beginning of time, Mankind has existed between The World of Light and the World of Darkness. Our secret society has been here forever. Protecting others from the creatures who inhabit the shadows and the night. Known only to the initiated by our true name, The Legacy." No, those aren't lyrics from a previously unreleased Spinal Tap song.

Our intrepid heroes – a psychic, an ex-Navy SEAL, an academic, a priest, a psychiatrist and her pint-sized psychic daughter – operate out of a mansion on an island near San Francisco, protecting mankind from sandy minions of the aforementioned World of Darkness. Bring on the medley of cursed relics, vengeful demons and, uh, other secret societies. Like, y'know, the bad kind.

Desperately humourless and rife with painfully stilted dialogue, this show can only be recommended to those unfortunate souls willing to sit through repeated viewings of *Omen III*. Despite a decent variety of plot lines, episodes all end the same way: a whole lotta table thumpin' "n' door slammin', cue the disembodied voices, flashing lights and wind machines, yadda yadda. Apart from the occasional profanity and the odd boob shot, it's pretty tame stuff, which would be fine if the overall execution weren't so pedestrian. Decent production values and a good cast are largely wasted; Helen Shaver (*The Outer Limits*, the original *Amityville Horror*) in particular deserves better than this.

TV series horror certainly experienced a long-overdue resurgence in the '90s, but *Poltergeist: The Legacy* is the poorest of the poor country cousins in the clan. Curl up with a box o' *Buffy* instead.

John W. Bowen



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THE LAST CELL ON THE LEFT

WOMEN'S PRISON MASSACRE (1983)

Starring Laura Gemser, Gabriele Tinti and Ursula Flores
Directed by Bruno Mattei
Written by Claudio Fragasso and Olivier Lefait
Retro Shock-O-Rama



Known under more titles than you can stick a shiv in, *Women's Prison Massacre* (a.k.a. *Blade Violent*, *Emanuelle Escapes From Hell*, etc.) is the follow-up to director Bruno Mattei's hugely successful *Caged Women* (a.k.a. *Chicks In Chains*, *Emanuelle in Hell*, etc.). Both were movies that rode the great, grey wave that was the women-in-prison exploitation film fad of the early '80s.

Incredibly sexy Laura Gemser (of the *Emanuelle* series) stars as Emanuelle, a reporter who was framed for drug possession and sent to prison after threatening to expose a crooked district attorney. Attempting to cope in prison proves difficult as she's thwarted at every turn by Albina, the prison "bad girl", which leads to arm wrestling and tussles in the shower, while spouting lines like, "I'll bite your nipples off!"

Interestingly, just as we're about to settle into the mandatory lesbian shower scenes and sadistic dyke guards beating on nubile, naked prisoners, the film suddenly takes a strange turn as four male death row inmates are inexplicably transferred to the prison. The four, led by Howard "Crazy Boy" Henderson (the late Gabriele Tinti: *The Eerie Midnight Horror Show*) quickly manage to overpower the guards and go on a rampage of rape and murder that includes forcing Emanuelle and Albina to play Russian roulette, with predictably gory results. In one particularly disturbing scene a female prisoner emasculates one of her would-be rapists by hiding a razor blade up her choo-choo (ouch!). Make no mistake, this is a mean-spirited movie.

The Shock-O-Rama DVD is surprisingly bare bones, and though it does come with informative liner notes by film historian 42nd St. Pete, it would have been nice to have had some interviews or commentaries included. There is an unrated version with seven minutes of extra gore but the print is so filthy it looks like it was recovered from a ditch. Watching it is better than spending the night in solitary confinement... but not by much.

Last Chance Lance

ANTISEPTIC TEENAGE MASSACRE

ONE DARK NIGHT (1983)

Starring Meg Tilly, Melissa Newman and Robin Evans
Directed by Tom McLoughlin
Written by Michael Hawes
and Tom McLoughlin
Shrek Show



Among movie victims, teenagers have proved to be the most versatile. I've watched more than my share of hunt-the-kids epics, and I've seen all sorts of boys and girls sliced, diced, skewered, juhhenned, flambéed, and consumed in pretty much every way imaginable. So it comes as a bit of a surprise to find that the zombie jamboree *One Dark Night* ignores the death-dealing possibilities of its own plot.

In it, a few high-school nymphets meet their end in a bland, bloodless tussle that never really pays off. There's plenty of screaming and squawking as the zombies close in, but how do they actually dispatch the little cuties? Crush them? Suffocate them? Grope them to death? Beats me – the girls get swarmed and appear later as corpses. It's the vaguest teenage massacre I've ever sat through.

Of course, the story is the usual rignarole of isolated sorority babes in peril. This time the girls are in a mausoleum, where they're stalked by shuffling cadavers revived by an evil psychic. A mausoleum setting ought to have plenty of visual possibilities, but what we get is an antiseptic, modernistic white marble background that's visually static and zilch on atmosphere.

The one striking sequence comes near the beginning: a police investigation of a crime scene in a sleazy tenement building uncovers furniture, plates and kitchen utensils stuck in the walls, corpses spilling out of a closet, and the remains of a dead psychic still sputtering with otherworldly radiance. This tensely offbeat sequence provides *One Dark Night* with its only moment of visual and emotional earnestness. (The only other redeeming feature is Meg Tilly, who plays the heroine and gives the role a plausible core of tension.)

There's a heap of extras on this unnecessary two-disc set, including writer-director Tom McLoughlin's rough cut. But the most entertaining stuff comes from the off-screen commentary by McLoughlin (whose next project was directing *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives*) and co-writer Hawes, who noodle away on the difficulties of shooting quickie horror films. Their recollections aren't quite the stuff of movie legend, but they give a fairly engaging take on the difficulties of cheapjack moviemaking.

Michael Leo

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Sony recently cracked open its little black book and redialed the classic babysitter creep-out **WHEN A STRANGER CALLS** to coincide with the theatrical remake.

Guess which one will really push your buttons....

A KILLER CALLS BACK

by Sean Plummer

Evil, they say, is banal; a seemingly harmless force which is actually malignant. In that sense, the new *When a Stranger Calls*, a semi-box office hit, is evil because it reinforces Hollywood's wrong-headed notions that a) horror fans will watch anything and b) our genre's treasures are ripe for the remaking.

The 1979 original (directed by Fred Walton, co-written by Walton and Steve Feke) is not perfect, nor is it absolutely original. Conceived as a sequel to 1974's *Black Christmas*, it rips off that film's "he's calling from inside the house!" gag and invokes the previous year's *Halloween* with its babysitter-in-peril scenario. Regardless, there's something unsettling about it that qualifies it as a minor classic.

The same cannot be said for its remake, however. Director Simon West (*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*) and screenwriter Jake Wade Wall have essentially taken the first twenty minutes of Walton's film and stretched them out to feature length. In the process they've built a relentlessly bland thrill machine without a heart, soul or many thrills.

As such, the set-up remains the same: babysitter Jill Johnson is harassed by an anonymous phone caller who asks her if she has checked the children. The police trace the calls to somewhere inside the house. But that's where the similarities end. For his remake, West casts the house—a huge lakefront property outfitted with an alarm system and various high-tech gad-

gets, as one of his main characters. Items that will play key roles later on—including a glass-enclosed aviary, a fireplace ignited by remote control, and an uninhabited guest cabin—are all clearly pointed out in order to foreshadow their later significance. It's a non-subtle device that defuses suspense instead of building it.

Our heroines are vastly different, too. Unlike Carol Kane's Jill, Camilla Belle's babysitter is a predictably resourceful teen cutie who fights back against her stalker. She makes the most of a script that offers few surprises (most of her screen time is spent answering the phone with a look of apprehension) but evokes less empathy than Kane's more vulnerable Jill.

The films also share key scenes that are played out with different results. When Kane's Jill is told by the police that the manic harassing her is inside the house, you feel her terror and shout at the screen for her to get out. But while Belle's babysitter looks scared, her safety never seems in doubt for a second.

The original *Stranger* also has more plot, getting the whole "he's in the house" bit over in the first act. Then, seven years after terrorizing Jill, psychopath Curt Duncan (Tony Beckley) escapes

from the mental hospital (more shades of *Halloween*). The father of the children he murdered hires private investigator John Clifford (played by an intense Charles Durning) to take the loony out before he kills again. Clifford tracks down the psycho, who has turned his murderous sights on Jill, now a mother herself. Some critics think only the first twenty minutes are worth watching, but Duncan's downfall is well worth the wait.

Englishman Beckley brings a pathetic neediness to Duncan which recalls Peter Lorre's child killer in Fritz Lang's *M*. He's a truly disturbed individual: lonely, crazy and terrified of the demons within. By contrast, Tommy Flanagan's 2006 "stranger"

(creepily voiced by genre vet Lance Henriksen) is a nameless, faceless boogeyman whose motives remain unexplained. He's a psycho, sure, but Duncan is a genuine monster and far scarier as a consequence.

1979's *Stranger* holds up as a tense psychodrama because it taps into everyone's fear of being victimized by something (or someone) unseen. Where West's remake fails is in its reliance on cheap jump scares in place of old-fashioned (and hard-earned) tension. The new *Stranger* may be slicker, but it's a lot less scary than the original. **B-**



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DEATH WALKS ON DVD

BY THE GORE-MET

Subtly isn't exactly the hallmark of the giallo, but lesser-known Italian producer/director Luciano Ercoli brought a restraint to the hands of the black-gloved killer that made for some of the best under-the-radar releases in the subgenre. Ercoli contributed three films to the popular cycle (his first, *Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, is part of Blue Underground's *Giallo Collection Vol. 2*), the latter two making up *The Luciano Ercoli Death Box Set*, the most accomplished release yet from NoShame Films.

Ercoli's gialli are comparatively tame, unremarkable within a genre noted for stylistic excess. But they competently hit every giallo mark – attractive lead actors, exotic locales, byzantine mystery, inventive cinematography, a swinging score and thrilling stalk 'n' slash sequences – while eschewing the outrageous sex and violence of seedier entries in favour of mind-bending mystery.

Death Walks on High Heels (1971) features the lovely Susan Scott (real name Nieves Navarro, Ercoli's wife) as a Parisian stripper named Nicole who becomes the target of a balacchia-clad murderer with piercing blue eyes. After her jewel thief father is found with his throat slit, a cache of diamonds goes missing, and she discovers blue contacts in her boyfriend's bathroom, Nicole flees to the English countryside with a wealthy doctor (played by Frank Wolff, who sadly committed suicide later that year) – the murderer hot on their heels.

This is a rock solid if minor giallo. The leads are charming and acquit themselves well.



Gastaldi's script throws out numerous red herrings and has an unexpected second-act twist, so the mystery remains engaging throughout. Navarro's beautiful bare bottom makes several appearances, but otherwise nudity is minimal; violence is sparse but effective (especially in the scene in

which a victim's right breast and face are mutilated with a switchblade), and Stelvio Cipriani's score is a delight.

Death Walks at Midnight (1972) again stars Scott, this time as Valentina, a temperamental model who's injected with an experimental hallucinogen as part of a newspaper publicity stunt and has a psychic vision of a brutal murder committed six months previous. She teams up with an insouciant reporter (Simón Andreu) to catch an armoured-mitt-wearing killer.

Ernesto Gastaldi and co.'s script kills time in the middle, and the drug-induced psychic link is outrageous to say the least, but the film works due to the chemistry between the leads. Scott keeps her clothes on the time, but an amazing climactic rooftop fist fight more than makes up for any lack of feminine pulchritude. Furthermore, a spiked metal glove serves as a rather smashing murder weapon in the standout gore scene.

Both films are gorgeous anamorphic transfers from Italian prints in their original 2.35:1 aspect ratio, and include

audio options in both English and Italian. Extras on the first disc consist of trailers and a photo gallery, while the second disc includes a longer television cut of *Death Walks at Midnight* and a photo gallery.

The real jewel in this set, though, is the exclusive soundtrack compilation called *The Sound of Love and Death: The Very Best of Stelvio Cipriani*. Cipriani's eclectic disco and funk-influenced, baroque pop/lounge jazz is the sonic background for an enormous number of significant Italian genre films, and this disc contains some of his most contagious compositions. Of particular note are the two pieces from *What Have They Done to Your Daughters?* (1974), the quintessential giallo soundtrack, and *Masquerade*, the rollicking disco song that plays as the radiebon mutants attack the TV studio in *Nightmare City* (1980). This disc alone is worth the price of admission.

Additionally, NoShame's packaging for this set

is absolutely handsome, particularly given the obscurity of the films. The three discs are housed in a triple clear Anamir case and feature gorgeous, minimalist artwork. Also included is a fifteen-page booklet with essays on the films, the director and principal actors by critic Chris D., and two postcards, each containing reproduction lobby cards promoting *Death Walks at Midnight*. A stunning package overall. **A**



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by JAMES GRANGER

One of the most noticeable differences between the two films, explain, is so much admittedly crap just lays there attached to an annoying images on the screen. If you ever find it to illustrate the worse than *Afterschool* to a *Scream*, two



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erotic (but most featuring a woman). There are plenty of slightly off-kilter baby backgrounds. If it awakens, it is the seemingly senseless reporter who will

White explains to the curious reporter that children like his niece are born every day in Oldfield. Why? The town has been cursed since its inception by cultists of senseless violence. "Oldfield does this to people," White insists. When the reporter doesn't believe him, White tells four gruesome tales from the twisted history of Oldfield to illustrate his point.

After *Midnight* (1989), on the other hand, is just bad. The Wheel brothers, the same writer/director team responsible for *Ewoks: The Battle of Endor*, bludgeon viewers with a humourless framing story about a group of underdogs who sign up for a course in the psychology of fear. The trying-hard-to-be-sinister prof warns the kids that they'll be learning things that can't be found in books. In fact, there are no books on the curriculum. "To understand

A movie poster for the film "After Midnight". It features three young people (two men and one woman) in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background is a fiery, orange and yellow explosion or fire. The title "AFTER MIDNIGHT" is written in large, bold, white capital letters at the top.

Indistinct characters with primed hair run their paces on stock sets, all filmed without flair or imagination, as the stories cover standard territory with the aforementioned haunted house, preyed-upon lost teenagers and a woman confronting her stalker. This movie is hack work, but with a little more cheese and a lot more conviction in the ridiculous Fear 101 premise, it could have been a whole lot more. Or is that a whole lot less?

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HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER (1958)/
BLOOD OF DRACULA (1957)

Lions Gate

American International Pictures may have been king of the drive-in back in the '50s and '60s, but with more than a few studio thumbs in their juncy back catalogue these days, their presence on DVD has been rather disheartening. Better late than never, long-time holdout Lions Gate has finally stepped up to the plate, debuting their Samuel Z. Arkoff Collection with a pair of classic AIP double features by the legendary producer—Bert I. Gordon's *Earth vs. The Spider* and *War of the Colossal Beast*, and Herbert L. Strock's *How to Make a Monster* and *Blood of Dracula*.

B-film whipping boy Bert I. Gordon has taken a good deal of heat for milking the giant creature gimmick throughout his 35-year career, but *Earth vs. The Spider* is easily one of his most entertaining efforts. When two small-town teens discover an enormous arachnid in a nearby cave, they convince the local sheriff to zap the beast with toxic bug spray. The kids' science teacher stupidly insists on displaying the giant carcass in the school gym and it isn't long until the spider—just stunned, of course—smashes its way back home. Obviously made with a raucous teenage audience in mind, it's a surprisingly fun flick with a cool thermonuclear score, decent, if dated, effects and touches of intentional camp.

The second feature on the disc is a quickie sequel to the previous year's *The Amazing Colossal Man*. *War of the Colossal Beast* catches up with the nuclear-mutated, 60-foot-tall Lt. Col. Glenn Manning down Mexico way. Having somehow survived his fall into the Hoover Dam, the now-deformed and batshit crazy Glenn is lugged to LA by the US Army, who try to stop the big guy from running amok by showing him images from



War of the Colossal Beast: A nuclear-mutated giant at play.

his pre-monster days. It doesn't work.

Gordon probably blew his budget on the colour stock used in the film's final few seconds because this sequel is embarrassingly cheap, with telltale padding and a logic-deprived script. Still, you've got to be impressed by the makeup job that turns Glenn's giant mug into a mess of bone and scar tissue, even if it really serves to hide the fact that the original film's colossal star was replaced by a stagehand.

Then there's director Herb Strock, who never quite achieved Gordon's renown among bad film fans, but not from lack of trying. Still, his *How to Make a Monster*, which kicks off the second Arkoff double feature, remains a tasty treat for monster schlock fans. This amusing, self-reflexive look at the B-film industry takes place at—ahem—American International Studios, as a veteran makeup artist develops a mind-control additive that he uses to compel monstified teenage actors to kill a pair of anti-horror studio heads. A colour ending is tacked on to this film too, but lasts for the whole final reel, as the friendly Jack Pierce-like makeup man inexplicably turns into a raving maniac. Look closely, and you'll spot masks from other AIP "classics" like *Ju-*

tion of the Saurer Men and *It Conquered the World*.

The disc's chaser, *Blood of Dracula*, probably should have been called *I Was a Teenage Vampire*, as it clearly apes AIP's biggest hits of the decade, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* and *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*. This time a boarding school chemistry teacher hypnotizes a tempestuous new female student with a magic amulet and turns her into a blood-

thirsty descendent of Dracula. The film itself is rife with bad acting and silly vampire make-up, but as with *How to Make a Monster*, Strock deftly taps into his pubescent audience's disdain for authenticity, as callous adults exploit innocent teens to do their evil dirty work.

Even though these Arkoff sets are a mixed bag, sporting decade-old transfers and no extras at all, the legacy of AIP is vital to understanding the history of genre film, and these discs are more than welcome additions to any serious B-film collection. With more nuggets from Arkoff waiting in the wings for release this spring (*Day the World Ended*, *The She Creature* and *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*/*Teenage Caveman*) the continued purging of the AIP vaults is cause for a Colossal Beast-sized celebration.

Paul Corcupe





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MAD THE MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE

by Chris Alexander



Some issues back, I was both championed and condemned for publicly declaring that Tobe Hooper's galactic vampire opera *LifeForce* was a better (though admittedly not nearly as relevant) horror film than his immortal calling card *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Now this page is about to give props to one of the most under-rated pieces of demented cinema ever unleashed. A film positively packed to the gory gills with severed limbs, bisected skulls, flayed flesh and screaming freakoids. Loathed by some, misunderstood by many, yet worshipped by a chosen few, lads and ladies, I give you the one, the only, skin-ripping, scalp-eating, cracked-out masterpiece: Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*.

Faced with the dilemma of reproducing the claustrophobic pseudo-documentary style of his untouchable original, Hooper, along with screenwriter L.M. Kit Carson, opted to build an entirely different beast altogether. Instead of a trailer-load of shrieking college kids, we get a

post-Apocalypse Now, pre-Blue Velvet Dennis Hopper as the alcoholic, half-mad, Stetson-wearing Texas Ranger Lefty Enright. Enright, brother of TCM's wheelchair-bound Franklin and super-screamer Sally, has been on the trail of the saw-wielding cannibalistic Sawyer clan for over a decade and, along with a Daisy Duke shorts-wearing DJ named "Stretch" (a feisty Caroline Williams, who's incidentally a ringer for Rue Morgue's Monica Kuehlert) devise a plan to bait the brood and hang 'em high. Seems Stretch has inadvertently captured the chainsaw slaughter of two first boy yahoos on tape (an incredible blood-spattered, Sawin'-orchestrated opening set piece that'll have you clawing at your easy chair's upholstery) and, after repeatedly playing the aural atrocity on air, the flesh-eaters come out of hiding to cut her down. From there the already hyperbolic narrative loses its mind and takes no prisoners in its mad quest to make you laugh 'til you puke.

TCM 2 is one of those wild, unclassifiable

genre films that run the risk of isolating all but the most tuned-in of cineastes. The performances — from Hopper's brilliant saw-for-a-saw turn as the vengeance-crazed Ranger, to Bill Moseley's career-defining reinvention of The Hitchhiker as a spastic, scab-swallowing hippie, to Jim Sedow's cantankerous rambling expansion of his Drayton Sawyer character — are so pulpy and over the top, that they threaten to chew through the very screen itself. Curiously, head ogre Leatherface (Bill Johnson replacing Gunnar Hansen) is portrayed as a sweet-natured, confused, sexually-frustrated innocent. His "fuck me gently with a chainsaw" encounter with Stretch is both tense and charming. This is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* reinvented as a steroidal, smutty funhouse, and only those with cast-iron tummies and jet-black senses of humour need apply.

It's interesting to note that Rob Zombie, who has openly admitted to cribbing from '70s horror staples, chiefly the first TCM, actually owes his oeuvre almost entirely to this picture, even going so far as "borrowing" Moseley and re-christening him "Dits". Indeed, *Zombie's House of 1000 Corpses* is a complete steal of TCM 2's tone, and *Dew's Rejects* even introduces a Hopper-esque anti-hero into the fold. Only problem is that *Zombie* is not, I repeat not, Tobe Hooper. He replaces moist Texan wit and natural eccentricity with forced cruelty and sophomoric obviousness.

Once only available in Canada in a completely butchered version, the lovely, sickening, unrelated American print has been widely distributed on DVD for some time in a not-so-special edition from MGM. Fans of this now twenty-year-old (can you believe it?) madcap classic: I urge you to unite. Follow my lead and demand the two-disc — hell, three-disc — set that this gem calls for. Did ya get that bitch, Leatherface? Alexander out. ☺

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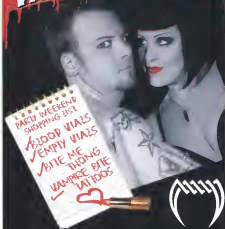


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IN THIS ISSUE!

THE TICKING

by Renée French (Up Shelf)

CRICKETS

by Sammy Harkham (Green & Quarterly)

THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW

#1 (OF 10) by Dave Barker, Chris Ryall and Gabriel Rodriguez (EW)

THE TERRITORY

by Jamie Delano and David Lloyd (Dark Horse)

HELLBOY: MAKOMA

#2 (OF 2) by Mike Mignola and Richard Corben (Dark Horse)

WEREWOLVES: CALL OF THE WILD

#1 (OF 3) by Mike Oliver and Joe Baccio (Moonstone)

Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world I feel like I can't take it – like my heart's going to cave in.” (American Beauty)

The day that my own heart caved in was December 19, 2005, after I read an advance copy of Renée French's original graphic novel *The Ticking*. And it wasn't just because of the indisputable beauty that inflates this delicate childlike work – it was the ugliness also, the cruelty, and ultimately the pathos. Though by book's end *The Ticking* is a heroic story, it's specifically a triumph over tragedy; and while monstrosity is the focus, its greatest success is in reminding the reader of the simple value of compassion.

With a name less Dickensian than existentially absurd, young Edison Steelhead is by definition a deformed boy. Born with monocular vision – his eyes fall on either side of his head, like those of a horse – he's misued on an island occupied only by himself and his father (his mother died in childbirth). He implicitly bemoans his quiet, lonely existence through his sketchbook, thus becoming a sort of amateur naturalist who documents “found” items such as cigarette butts and dead household flies. Without knowing that he is doing so, Edison transforms the detritus of everyday life into art, in the bigger picture discovering that ugliness truly resides in the eye of the beholder, and finds within himself the love that his father cannot give.

The Ticking is not autobiographical in any conventional sense. French's father – also an artist – never fully embraced his daughter's taste for the horrific (or her love of the comic book medium).

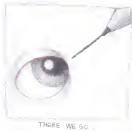
“This book is about me and my dad a lot, well to an extent – but I lost my perspective in terms of reality,” French tells *Rue Morgue*. “You could argue that losing per-

spective and getting too close allowed a bigger nightmare to surface because it all got so distorted or exaggerated, because I'm so close to it, so right there in its face.”

Of course, she's absolutely right. French's talent as a communicator involves “slicing life,” parsing information instead of making it obvious. The majority of the life in *The Ticking* is lived off-panel, and using glimpses in place of outright character arcs only enhances the book's dreamlike (or, if you prefer, nightmarish) quality. Simple images and statements – most of them Edison's observations – end up carrying tremendous weight and conveying intended significance: curious scars flanking his father's head, a picture thrown in the garbage, a mask found buried in the garden. The pinnacle of his father's misplaced affection involves Edison being taken, ignorantly, to a plastic surgeon, who draws on his face as if it were a canvas and talks about him in the third person. Properly approached, *The Ticking* is a fully immersive experience.

“I enjoy non-linear stories,” French points out. “I think they involve the audience more.” She adds that she cut over twenty fully completed panels from the final book. “I made a decision to not pull a Spike Lee and scream my message out, I would add something in that was an explanation, when it felt to me that it was only there to explain, I took it out. I was ruthless; many drawings I left out. Twenty altogether – fully done, not just pencils, fully rendered to every detail – had to go because they were only there to facilitate exposition.”

That lack of exposition adds to the nightmarish qualities that inform every aspect of French's body of work. Among her previous titles is *The Ninth Gland* (Dark Horse, 1999), which follows two sisters who find a mutated beast in the midst of the birthing process and seek a janitor's help in the filthy



The Ticking: A beautifully surreal tale of a deformed boy and his sketchbook.

basement of a hospital. And in French's first work, the controversial early-'90s series *Grif Bath* (Fantagraphics), schoolchildren are outright abusive to animals but less out of cruelty than an instinct for exploration. By comparison, she admits that *The Ticking* is her “least horrific book.” Or perhaps just her most subtle, as it preserves her instinct for coupling children's innocent curiosity with disturbing situations and imagery.

“What can I say,” she laughs, “it's a gift, and it seems to just keep on giving.”

For a portfolio that includes an early incarnation of Edison Steelhead, visit reneefrench.com



QUICK CUTS

Here's something to chomp about: Crickets, an ongoing horror tale from Deffen & Quarterly. Acclaimed alternative artist Sammy Harkham gets things off to an immediately bizarre mid-story start, as a never-named protagonist rolls down a mountain in a hail of arrows with his right leg on fire. By issue's end he's become a ghoul, wandering where the wind blows, while in the company of a mute Golem who (apparently) invoke him from the sleep of death.

What transpires when this pair encounters a father and son in mourning is shocking, but this book's success has less to do with Harkham's plot twists (which are as strong as his word economy) than it does with his sense for solid, episodic storytelling. Smart fans of absurdist horror should plan to follow this die-namic duo down their road to Hell.

Someone at IDW clearly knows their Clive Barker, and it's probably editor Chris Ryall, who's adapting — in twelve issues, sweet! — *The Great and Secret Show*. The art of adaptation is as reliant on what gets cut as what gets conserved, and the first issue's deft summary of the admittedly cluttered opening arc to Barker's dark fantasy novel stands as a stellar example of judicious editing. Ryall also knows how to assign artists, and Gabriel Rodriguez does an ace job of imagining tortured protagonist Randolph Jaffe, the dead letter office lackey who stumbles upon the secret art of dark magic by opening arcane mail. The guy looks like a cross

between Harvey Pekar and Reid Fleming, which is perfect because he's an absolute ass. And two thumbs up on the two cover variants: dry or dark, the view from above's suitably bleak.

Always remember: The Matrix is the world — we just live in it. There's no point in debating whether or not classic *Hellblazer* writer Jamie Delano and *V for Vendetta* artist David Lloyd meant to co-opt the Wachowskis' vision in *The Territory* (because hey, maybe they were riffing on *The Invisibles* instead). The bottom line is that *The Territory*, originally released as four issues in late-1999 and now collected in a superbly-coloured yet very affordable hardback, is actually a case of Cthulhu in Agent Smith's clothing. That's right: Lovecraft lurks below, and kudos to Lloyd's stunning visual segues that see computer cables becoming long luxurious hair becoming tentacles.

As is usually the case with Mike Mignola's convoluted, culture-reliant *Hellboy* stories, patience pays off in the back half. Following *The Gift* and *The Island* is yet another super-short (two-issue) tale, *Hellboy: Makoma*, the latter terms from an African dialect, meaning, "He who is greatest and without fear." As a story, *Makoma* operates in the capacity of a flashback that may or may not actually be part of HB's history; regardless, master storyteller Mignola raised about a dozen questions in part one and answers them all and then some in the conclusion. Guest penciller Richard Corben draws the African flashback epic between Mignola's NYC-based bookend frame, and the transition between artists is practically seamless, even if Corben does give a much thinner jaw to ol' homhead.



Part crime story, part horror, *Werenwolves: Call of the Wild* is a three-issue miniseries off to a promising start. The dialogue in the back end of the book is a little exposition heavy, but the strong, silent-type lead — an American Indian, who might or might not be a werewolf, in search of his missing brother, who might or might not be a werewolf — is well-written, and the steps in his investigation make sense. A word of friendly advice to artist Joe Bucco: work on your werewolf. Your cartoony look throws the otherwise solid visual characterization off balance. If readers judge this book by its covers — and when don't they? — then sales will be adversely affected, which would be a howling shame. **X**



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AN ERSATZ ENCYCLOPEDIA • HAUGHTY HITCHCOCK • VINTAGE VERSES



The Nightmare Encyclopedia

Jeff Belanger and Kirsten Dalley
New Page Books

New Page Books, publishers of *The Nightmare Encyclopedia*, boast "Practical Books to Uplift Your World." With titles like *Companion for the Apprentice Wizard*, *Fairy Magick*, *Exploring Anas and The Atlantis Encyclopedia*, the "practical" part of that claim is shaky at best. Same goes for this title, which promises, "Your Darkest Dreams Interpreted."

Jeff Belanger, whose credentials include writing *The Encyclopedia of Haunted Places* and being "a voracious fan of the unexplained, including nightmares", and Kirsten Dalley serve up a 350-page tome that has entries as diverse as Descartes, Hawaii, Old Hag Syndrome, and *The Wizard of Oz*. There are interesting tidbits of info that make for decent bathroom reading — like a summary of John E. Mack's work, which linked adult nightmares directly to childhood fears — but there's also a lot of filler. For example, the Billy Crystal comedy *Analyze This* may have scenes of dream interpretation in it, but that doesn't make it even remotely relevant; the entry for Zombie is mostly an explanation of what a zombie is, an overview of zombie movies, then a few sentences about their role in bad



dreams; and there's even a definition of saor-ing. Talk about tenuous connections.

Worse, though, is the pointlessness of many of the interpretations. Hey, didja know that having a nightmare about an Avalanche "represents some source of fear and/or vulnerability", that Garbage "represents the unwanted and discarded pieces of our lives", or that "being bound by rope signifies a loss of freedom"? It's not the kind of illumination you'll need your intellectual sunglasses for.

So, are these uncredited interpretations culled from dream dictionaries, ideas previously set forth by uncredited academics, or just the authors' personal take on bad dreams? Given the incorporeal, subjective nature of nightmares, they're not something easily brought into the scientific realm, but this tome is weighed down by flotsam when it should be buoyed by insight.

Dave Alexander

Hitchcock and 20th century cinema

John Orr
Wallflower Press

The debt modern cinema owes Alfred Hitchcock is incalculable. And despite the endless parade of homage, parody, post-modern deconstruction and straight-up rip-offs that his work has inspired, few of the volumes dedicated to Hitchcock have



sought to trace the effect his singular approach to the craft has had on other filmmakers. *Hitchcock and 20th Century Cinema* attempts to analyze the master director's formative touchstones, cinematic and otherwise, but after reading, we're not sure this lesson was entirely necessary.

Author John Orr gets off to a good start by digging up the roots of Hitchcock's recurring themes (particularly the illusion of personal identity in films such as *Frenzy* and *Marnie*) in works as diverse and contradictory as David Hume and Sigmund Freud, as well as the significant stylistic cues he drew — and counter-rejected to — from Weimar Germany-era films by Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau.

But in tracing those influences to the filmmakers that followed in Hitchcock's wake, Orr studiously avoids the usual suspects. Brian De Palma is mentioned in passing on page two and never comes up again, while suspense stylists like Mario Bava and Dario Argento appear to have fallen below Orr's radar completely. It's an unconventional choice, and one that also severely limits his scope and, ultimately, undermines the credibility of his thesis.

Snobbily eschewing what he refers to as a "contagion of imitation", Orr finds what he believes to be more significant echoes of Hitchcock in head-scratching choices like Peter Weir and Wong Kar-Wai (based, it

The Grim Reader

HEADSTONE CITY

Tom Piciorilli
Random Spectra

Moving away from his recent Southern Gothic works to tell a NYC mob tale about a young ex-con literally haunted by the ghosts of his past, Piciorilli weaves a tense and sometimes somber yarn with just enough supernatural elements to lift it above more typical crime fiction fare. Subtle and masterful.



Monica S. Kuebler

PAINT IT BLACK: A GUIDE TO GOTHIC HOMEMAKING

Voltaire

Wesley Books

Need a gothic love nest quick and on a budget? Grab this wacky little how-to book for simple tips to turn your space from drab to devilish. A pretty useful crypt-warming gift, it covers the basics (black, bells and brocade), and includes chapters on creating ghostly grimoire journals, pimping your Dracula and more.



Lisa Ladouceur

LONE WOLF

Edo Van Belkom
Tundra Books

Van Belkom's young adult sequel to the award-winning *Wolf Pack* has a quartet of teen lycanthropes struggling with the usual high school woes as well as protecting their sacred forest against clear-cutters. Adolescents will resonate with the character of Argus, who yearns for total independence. An idiot? "woven read."



Richard Davis

DARK FURIES: WEIRD TALES OF BEASTIES AND BEASTS

Vincent Sneed, ed.

Die Monster Die! Books

Felty families kick monster ass in this fifteen-story collection of feminist-slanted fables and fantasy. Patrick Thomas' volleys in *Sick Day* and the psychiatrist in CJ Henderson's *Mercy* are fine examples of heroines that send bad boys back to their hell-holes, protecting the world for us all. Too bad almost all the contributors are male.



Lisa Ladouceur



Hitchcock and 20th Century Cinema: Janet Leigh and Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*.

seems, on tenuous thematic callbacks from *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *In the Mood For Love* to Hitch's *Notorious*, before setting his focus squarely (and perfunctorily) on the Art Wanker Jesus himself, David Lynch, in the book's final pages.

This Film Studies 101 approach to the director seeks to elevate Hitchcock whilst simultaneously looking down its nose at his audience, rendering his legendarily pulse-pounding and subversive filmography in the dullest terms imaginable. What should be an intriguing and long-overdue exploration of Hitchcock's towering effect on genre and medium alike is instead transformed into reams of pseudo-intellectual doublespeak that the director himself would likely have balked at, the sort of mental masturbation of use to only first-year film students and coffee shop cinephiles. All others beware.

Joseph O'Brien

poems bewitched and haunted

John Hollander, ed.

Everyman's Library

Leave it to the exquisite Everyman's Library imprint to publish a book of poems devoted to a "delightfully ghoulish array of specters and sorceresses, witches and ghosts, hags and apparitions" (to quote the dust jacket itself).

Poems Bewitched and Haunted, an attractive, well-bound hardcover is a veritable who's who of the all-time poetic greats: Coleridge, Baudelaire, Dickinson and Rossetti (naturellement, tabernac), Homer, Ovid, Hardy, Goethe, Shelley, Poe, Longfellow, Donne, Pope, Stevenson, Swinburne and many other literary heavyweights can be found within, each talking their respective stabs at all things macabre.

Alongside being conceptually cool, this little collection (256 pages that cover some 3000 years of poetry) might also be surprisingly

unique and, thus by default, important. Some quick cross-referencing with the *Penguin Book of Poetry*, as well as the Norton and Oxford anthologies reveals that not one of the *Poems* appears in any of these other tomes. Ergo, works like these are rarely printed.

The question of their canonical value is best left to drunken grad students, but the poems are still works by the very best in the business. To wit, from Matthew "Monk" Lewis we get: "May the Grim White Woman, who haunts this wood, The Grim White Woman, who feasts on blood, As soon as they number twelve months and a day, Tear the hearts of your babes from their bosoms away." While Pierre De Ronsard gives us "Soon after, victim of your arts, The man is dead, his fleshy parts, A nest of parasites."

As spooky, dark and delightful as the works are, this is, concurrently, a collection replete with iambic pentameter, trope, Skeltonic verse and all the other big poetic devices. In short: craft. All that to say that if you enjoy a little literature with your verse... you could do significantly worse.

Michael Mitchell

kolchak: The night stalker chronicles

Joe Gentile, Garrett Anderson

and Lori Gentile, eds.

Moonstone Publishing

In two 1970s TV movies that broke ratings records, and a series that did anything but, the inimitable Darren McGavin brought to life a character who charmed his way into the hearts of many a horror fan, battling monsters and authority figures alike as Kolchak, *The Night Stalker*. His influence is felt in shows like *The X-Files* and, most recently, a dreary 2005 *Night Stalker* revamp starring Stuart Townsend that bested its source only in the

DAVID WELLINGTON's online serial zombie novel **MONSTER ISLAND** claws its way to print this month from Thunder's Mouth Press.

MONSTERS TAKE MANHATTAN

by MONICA S. KUEBLER

Two years ago when David Wellington launched his online project, *Monster Island*, there was no indication, apart from the quality of the writing, that it would become the phenomena it did.

Originally conceived as a web serial, with the author adding a new 1000-word chapter each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the site attracted some 40,000 visitors with an estimated 10,000 staying to read the entire 60-installment book. Its popularity not only secured a publishing deal for the writer but inspired him to pen two sequels, *Monster Nation* and *Monster Planet*.

Out this month as a novel from Thunder's Mouth Press, *Monster Island* takes place after a zombie apocalypse has caused the world powers to collapse completely. A former UN official finds himself blackmailed into travelling to zombie-infested NYC in order to secure AIDS medication for a third world warlord. With only an army of Somali teen girl soldiers in tow, he quickly learns that not all zombies are mindless flesh-munchers; some feed on the energy of the undead masses and can control the shambling corpses.

"I wondered what the zombies did when there were no living humans around — Romero and Ford never really explored that," says Wellington of the book's roots. "I [also] started to wonder how our present political climate would affect the outcome of a zombie apocalypse. Would ethnic and religious differences be forgotten in the face of such a horror or would they make things worse? It struck me that the worst parts of planet Earth, those places that history has basically spat upon for centuries, would be the best prepared to fight back against the undead."

Wellington, who primarily wrote sci-fi stories in his youth, explains that being in NYC's Union Square on the one-year anniversary of 9/11 inspired his decision to get serious about writing

horror: "People are scared, really scared of the world they live in now. That makes horror relevant more now than ever before."

Monster Island originally launched on April 2, 2004 (at brokentyper.com/monster), thanks in part to Alex Lencicki of Brokentyper, Wellington's friend who provided both the webspace and incentive for the project and also gave the author tips on writing for the web.

"The action had to start from the first page, chapters should be relatively short and move quickly, every chapter should end with, if not a cliffhanger, at least a question that needed to be answered," Wellington explains. "I recognized immediately that those were the same rules the writers in the old pulp magazines like *Black Mask* and *Weird Tales* used to abide by... That was one thing that really excited me about this project — I got to write the same way my literary heroes used to."

However, while Wellington admits that writing the novel in real-time for the web was fun, it was also a lot more work than he'd initially expected.

"Writing the book in real-time meant I had to do all my research for a given chapter the day before I had to write it. I wouldn't have been happy with a book that didn't make sense. I did a ton of research on the Internet, often looking up words in a Somali dictionary or doing a Google image search for pictures of bog mummies while I had my word processor open at the same time." Writing the serial also gave Wellington the opportunity to explore New York, the city he now calls home. It was an exploration that involved taking copious notes and imagining every alleyway and rooftop from a zombie's perspective.

If anyone needs further proof that the Internet is changing the face of modern publishing, here it is: Like *Monster Island*, its sequels have also been picked up for publication by Thunder's



Mouth. But moving the stories from the web to print presented a new challenge for the author.

"For the print version I've gone through the book and revised a lot," says the author. "Because I wrote it in real-time there were a lot of rough edges that needed smoothing out. I listened to what my online readers said — I saw where some sections didn't work or where a part of the novel was unclear, and I fixed those."

Wellington, who is currently in talks with a company that wants to turn *Monster Island* into an immersive video game, is hard at work on his latest web serial *Thirteen Bullets*, a gory thriller that follows America's sole vampire hunter as he seeks to eradicate a recently discovered, previously thought extinct, clan of brutally vicious and bloodthirsty vampires. New chapters appear three times weekly at brokentyper.com/thirteenbullets.



The shell collector

Christopher Golden

Cemetery Dance Publications

The color out of darkness

John Pelan

Cemetery Dance Publications

The novella can be an ideal length for horror; it can encompass complex themes, while maintaining the tension of a short story, and avoiding the plot-padding pitfalls of longer works. Perhaps knowing this, Cemetery Dance has embraced the format with their hardcover novella line, and its newest entries *The Shell Collector* and *The Color Out of Darkness*.

The Shell Collector peers into the heart of a Massachusetts fishing town that is cyclically plagued by an aquatic creature that the old-timers call "the Shell Collector." So when protagonist Richie Feelan dreads up something lanky in his lobster trap, it's clear the Collector's on the hunt again.

Christopher Golden's tale is intimate and his character relationships are complex and believable. Additionally, there's a richness to the quasi-Bogotá atmosphere of the ailing seaside town, but the book still hits its junkies.

The Color Out of Darkness, while cool, is gripped in without any attempt at explanation, save for a brief historical snippet. Add to this a clip-out climax and the result is one of Golden's less successful efforts.

John Pelan fares better with his riff on Lovecraft: *The Color Out of Darkness*, a gritty work that steers mostly clear of HPL tribula-lane clichés. In it, Seattle's underbelly becomes the setting for sex, suburbanian guile, mutations, more sex, and a nefarious plot by a local cult. Did I mention there was sex? The gentleman from Providence would've fainted like a schoolgirl at Pelan's visceral interpretation of his myths. At points the novella does stoop to a more catalogue of depravity and gore, but Pelan manages to sidestep total exploitation by giving his story a philosophical backbone fleshed out with solid writing. He wisely adopts the key principles (rather than just the trappings) of HPL's works and weaves them into a compellingly fresh motif.

As Cemetery Dance continues its diverse novella line, it seems clear that they've snatched vapid niche-marketing in favour of giving their authors wide creative latitude. Because of this, these books will only enrich the horror lit canon.

Richard Gavin

speediness of its cancellation. This resurgence in interest spurred Moonstone Publishing to release an anthology of short stories based on the original show, a companion volume to their ongoing series of *Night Stalker* graphic novels.

Some stories are note-perfect pastiches of the show, while others chart previously unexplored territory. For example, James W. Bates' *The Ungrateful Dead* nails the tone and texture of the TV series so brilliantly it's impossible not to



hear McGavin's cynical inflections narrate the tale of Kolchak's face-off with a zombie punk band, plus one-time *Batman* writer Steven Grant offers a melancholy glimpse into a possible future with *The Last Temptation Of Kolchak*. Only a few stories, notably *Kolchak And The Cult Murders* by Mike W. Barr (another former *Dark Knight* scribe), land too wide of the mark, with no supernatural content whatsoever, while hard-boiled heavyweights Stuart Kaminsky (*The Night Talker*) and Max Allan Collins (*Open House*) lend an appropriate noir spin to Kolchak's business-as-usual.

The only real caveat is the placement of the character in present day. It has the feel of an editorial directive, and while it may make the stories more accessible to younger readers, the blatant and often gratuitous references to cellphones and computers clash with the image of McGavin bunched over a manual typewriter, recording notes into a portable tape deck the size of a cereal box.

Still, the tales within are written by authors clearly in love with their subject, with passion and wit that transcends any time period. If only the editors had been able to coerce a new Kolchak tale from Richard Matheson.

Joseph O'Brien

cell: a novel

Stephen King

Scribner

With mindless multitudes (read: zombies) still en vogue, it should come as no surprise that the prolific "King" of horror would endeavour to capitalize on the recent undead renaissance. With his latest effort, *Cell*, Stephen King attempts to put a new face on the zombie novel.

In the 384-page book, a phenomenon which comes to be known as "the pulse" is unleashed upon an unsuspecting, cellphone-using populace. When the pulse is broadcast, anyone unfortunate enough to be exposed to the signal is instantly turned into an unthinking, bloodthirsty killing machine. Everyone else must do what they can to survive the mindless mob, but as the "normies" soon find out, they don't stay mindless for long. They're evolving!

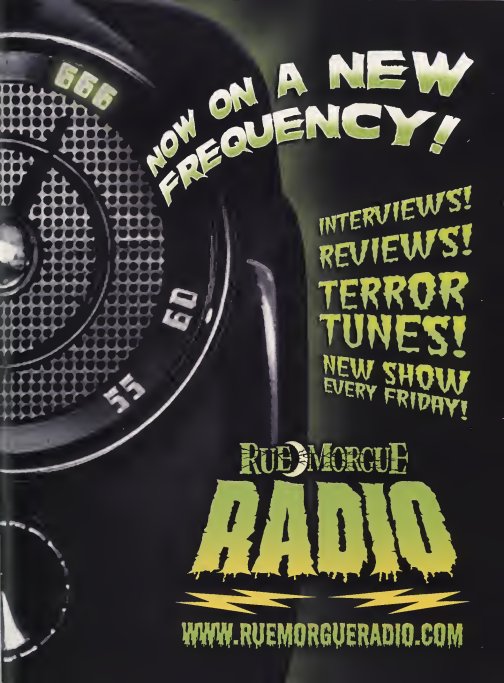
Using shades of Romero and Matheson, King paints a fresh veneer on the faded zombie subgenre. *Cell* isn't the literary rendering of *Night of the Living Dead* or a reworking of *I Am Legend*, though, it's an entirely new animal—the telepathic zombie story. King's antagonists develop the ability to read minds and influence actions, making the characters unsafe even inside their own heads. No locked doors or boarded-up windows are going to keep them secure, and because of this the reader is smothered with a claustrophobic anxiety that persists even in the midst of the story's expansive setting.

As is typical in King novels, there are plenty of pop culture references, and an abundance of Maine-ese, but there's also enough visceral detail to sate the average gorehound. However, even though King may have succeeded with his new approach to zombies, the story is far from perfect. The main problem with *Cell* is that it's full of broad strokes but very little fine detail. Who caused "the pulse"? Have the normies triumphed? Will society survive? These questions remain unanswered, and lead you to surmise a sequel.

While *Cell* is no masterpiece of modern horror, it does fine better than King's last few efforts, proving that there may be life (and death) in the old boy yet.

Kenneth Bonnie





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TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

THE MUMMIES OF ANCIENT EGYPT

by Lisa Ladouceur
Photos by Deane Hughes

A full moon shines down upon the sands of Upper Egypt, throwing the massive stone monuments into shadow. Here, at the Temples of Karnak, a bombastic sound and light show is underway. I join a hundred other travelers in a guided nighttime walk through this antiquities site, a vast complex of secret passageways, tombs and towering obelisks just north of the city of Luxor. As we wander in wonder, a dramatic voice-over booms: "When torches light the West Bank, you know the embalmers are working late."

Here, in the middle of the desert, I am learning about the history of Karnak's rulers, ancient pharaohs whose names are known far beyond Egyptology circles—Ramesses, Soti, Amenhotep—and the massive necropolis they built just across the Nile River. This is the stuff of *National Geo-*

graphic specials, of monster movies, of myth. It's a breathtaking attraction, but it's only a teaser for the real reason I'm visiting Egypt.

I've come for the mummies.

Other cultures have preserved dead bodies, intentionally or by accident (see Mexico's mummies, *MM42*), but none perfected the technique quite like the Egyptians. Over 4000 years, they developed elaborate rituals and embalming treatments to ensure their best men, women, children—even sacred pets—would never turn to ashes and dust. Their obsession with the afterlife has allowed generations of visitors to come face to shriveled face with history.

A quick flight or an overnight train ride from the Egyptian capital, Cairo, puts you right where the greatest concentration of important mummies have been found—on the West Bank of the Nile river, across from the city of Luxor, known to the ancient Egyptians as Thebes. This is the original Death Valley, a labyrinth of secret burial chambers carved into rock. As any loyal viewer of mummy movies knows, these tombs were too tempting for early explorers, who cracked open and pilfered them, scattering the sacred corpses to museums across the globe (see sidebar) and potentially earning themselves a fatal curse in the process. Still, a visit to modern-day Luxor offers plenty of opportunity to see Egyptian mummies as well as their carefully constructed necropolis.

To explore all the sights in the West Bank requires an early start, good sunblock and ample water supplies, and at least one full day. The top ticket is Valley of the Kings, a desolate canyon containing the burial tombs of famed pharaohs like Ramesses II and the boy king Tutankhamen. Tiny black doors dot the cliffs, gateways to dozens of chambers that once housed ornate mummy-protecting sarcophagi and precious artifacts. Entering one today often requires a long climb or slow crawl down through deep pits into dark, claustrophobic chambers

alongside a true terror: hordes of cruise ship seniors. This wonder of the world is a very popular place. Still, to stand (or crouch) in a 3000-year-old room covered from floor to ceiling in hieroglyphs from the Egyptian Book of the Dead is as eerie as it is awe-inspiring. Indiana Jones and Lara Croft wannabes will get their exploration fix here, for certain.

Of the six tombs I visited, I am captivated most by that of Tutankhamen II, high up in the mountainside, filled with traps for would-be thieves. After descending deep into the rock, past the sweltering antechamber and into the burial chamber painted with funerary scenes, I find the heavy quartzite sarcophagus resting there, as it has been for over 3400 years.

With the exception of King Tut, who is still resting in his tomb, encased in one of his five sarcophagi, the Egyptian pharaohs now live in the more carefully controlled surroundings of museum display cases. So it's a short ferry ride back to the East Bank, where two museums give you the scoop on mummification, and your first glimpse at the long-dead bodies.

Luxor's official Mummification Museum is a good start for the mummy newbie. Its small, dimly lit room offers a high-school level examination of the mummification process, a look at the tools of the ancient embalming trade, some mummified animals, and the remains of one high priest, Moseharti, resting in his sarcophagus.

The Egyptians used a combination of materials to achieve their everlasting good looks: natron salt, sawdust, chios turpentine and bitumen resin. It's the bitumen, pronounced "moumim" in Persian, that gave mummies their black, glassy appearance, and their name. Alongside specimen jars of these ingredients, the Mummification Museum presents crude metal tools, such as the hook used to remove the brain via the nose.

Cleaning the dead body of its internal organs was a pivotal part of the embalming process, and special canisters were designed to house the viscera for all eternity. (I guess if you get hungry in the afterlife you need those intestines.) Into these





Displayed at the Luxor Museum: A mummified monkey and (opposite lower) a canopic jar.

four canopic jars were placed lungs, stomach, intestines and liver, at which point the body was sewn up, desiccated, anointed and meticulously bandaged in the linen wrappings we've come to associate with mummies.

One of the best mummy specimens in the world lies across the street in the Luxor Museum. After being robbed in the late 1800s, Ramses I spent 100 years gathering dust in a Niagara Falls, Ontario museum, before being purchased by Toronto collector William Jamieson, who in turn sold it to Atlanta's Michael C. Carlos Museum. In 2004 the museum donated Ramses back to Egypt, and a special wing of the Luxor museum was built to display it, along with the mummy of Ahmose I. These mummies are now laid out in glass cases, their wrinkled warrior faces visible in all their glory.

Outside of Luxor, Egypt is still crawling with mummies and burial chambers, of course. In every city, from Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea to Aswan near the Sudanese border, old museums and antiquities sites attract mummy hunters. But to truly sate your appetite for dried flesh, the Egyptian Museum

in Cairo is a must-see. The massive building seems as ancient as its occupants. Crumbling walls and antiquated wooden display cases house thousands of astonishing artifacts, including the complete contents of King Tut's tomb, dozens and dozens of sarcophagi and a special Royal Mummy collection. It's worth the extra ticket to enter this dark room and wander amongst Egypt's greatest rulers. Amenhotep I is still perfectly wrapped; Tutankhamun shows off curled hair and pierced ears; Seti I, who died around 1300 BC, looks not a day over 100. And just to offset the group's peaceful repose is Sesostris II, his head bashed in and arms twisted in a defensive posture.

For the ancient Pharaohs, Egypt was a dangerous place where life was brutish and short. But thanks to the wisdom of the embalmers, it remains a romantic haven for modern death culture vultures.

For more information on visiting Egypt and its mummies, see touregypt.net. Prices in CAD (approx.) — Karnak tour: \$11; Valley of the Kings (including Tut): \$35; Mummy museum: \$7; Luxor Museum: \$11. ☺



If you can't get to Egypt soon, check out these collections of exquisite corpses around the world.

BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

By far the best collection outside of Egypt: over 75 mummies and intricately painted sarcophagi in gorgeous remodelled galleries, plus the Rosetta Stone — the key to Egyptian hieroglyphs. thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, CHICAGO

Full-scale Egyptian tomb and 23 mummies on permanent display. Will host touring exhibit Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of Pharaohs from May 2006 to January 2007. fieldmuseum.org

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO

Over 1,500 Egyptian artifacts in their African gallery including papyrus fragments from the *Book of the Dead* and seven sarcophagi including Djedmaatsankh, a female musician. rom.on.ca

EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, TURIN, ITALY

Founded in 1824, has over 70 human mummies and 100 animal mummies amongst its 30,000 artifacts. museoegizio.it

UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY, PHILADELPHIA

A world leader in the scientific study of mummies, offers an extensive collection, including two human mummies, Hapi Men and Pum II. museum.upenn.edu

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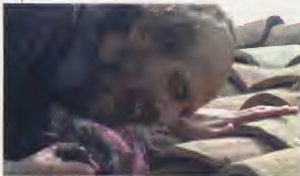
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THE GORE-MET

DINNER'S READY!

This issue, The Gore-met goes for Joe D'Amato's dead throat with a look at the filmmaker's infamous video nasty *Antropophagus*.



Antropophagus: Filmmaker/director George Eastman as the cannibalistic titular character

ANTROPOPHAGUS (1980)

Starring George Eastman, Tisa Farrow and Saverio Valione
Directed by Joe D'Amato
Written by Luigi Montefiore
Shrek Show

Before a fatal coronary claimed him in 1999, cinematographer/director Aristide Massaccesi was one of the world's most prolific filmmakers. He's credited with over 180 films under a variety of pseudonyms, predominantly as Joe D'Amato. Massaccesi cranked out cheap exploitation films in the popular genre of the day and is mainly regarded for his softcore *Emmanuelle* series and the hardcore porn he made after the Italian film industry bottomed out in the late '60s (see p.15). He also served as mentor to Luigi Montefiore (a.k.a. George Eastman) and Michele Soavi, producing their first films.

Massaccesi dabbled in far too many genres to be considered a master of any, but his films looked good, and some actually were good. Then there are those that endured solely on the strength of their salacious titles.

Antropophagus (literally "Man-eater", and also known as *Antropophagus: The Beast*, as well as a host of other titles), along with horror/XXX

hybrids *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (1980) and *Porno Holocaust* (1981), represent the most notorious films in the D'Amato canon. Just say those titles out loud – what forbidden and perverse delights they must contain! Yeah, I thought that way too, but after tracking down some grotty bootleg tapes I discovered that there's no truth in advertising. Thanks to a series of gorgeous DVD releases by Media Blasters's Shriek Show label, you too can marvel at the mind-numbing mediocrity of these much-vaunted cheapies.

The truth behind the cult stature bestowed upon *Antropophagus* is as mundane as the film itself. In 1984 the British Department of Public Prosecutions, in an effort to regulate the home video industry in the UK, compiled a list of films deemed unfit for public consumption, later dubbed "video nasties" (see RM447). *Antropophagus* was banned for a brief and shockingly-executed scene in which the titular beast nips a bloody fetus (actually a butcher shop rabbit) from its still-living mother and eats it, as if this risible vignette was shocking enough to rouse the audience from the torpor induced by the 52 stuffy minutes that precede it.

Tisa (sister of Mia) Farrow stars as Julie, a nanny who hitches a ride aboard a yacht char-

tered by a group of university students for a lazy voyage through the Greek islands. Arriving at Julie's remote destination, they find the island's village devoid of life, and soon become prey for a crazed cannibal monster (Eastman). In between much taking, walking and running, two almost-remarkable gore scenes are shown: the aforementioned baby buffet and a closing climax that involves pig intestines pulled out of a laughable latex stomach. The few moments that are genuinely atmospheric, such as the discovery of an ancient ossuary that is the beast's lair, are so drawn out that all tension fuzzles away. The film is further undermined by a minimalist electronic score that vacillates between chilling and cheese. In the cold light of digital day, the reputation that *Antropophagus* has as some masterpiece of spaghetti splatter is completely unwarranted – it stinks!

That said, this is Gorehound 101 material and Media Blasters have lavished unnecessary attention on this former staple of the bootleg market (which they've titled *Antropophagus: The Grim Reaper*). The two-disc set features an outstanding presentation of the original uncut 1:78:1 Italian print, English and Italian language options, trailers, a 67-minute documentary titled *Joe D'Amato: Totally Uncut 2*, a featurette containing footage of George Eastman and co-star Zora Kerova discussing the film before an audience, two alternate opening credit sequences, a photo gallery and two hidden Easter eggs. **B**

Antropophagus is a bland soup that needs more fetus!





Soundtrack of the beast.



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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, CHRIS ALEXANDER, KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR AND AARON LUFTON



DIE YOU ZOMBIE BASTARDS!

Various

Necro-Tone Records

The world's first ever "serial killer superhero rock 'n' roll zombie road movie romance", *Die You Zombie Bastards* offers up no less than seven(!) versions of the toxic title tune. Highlighted by the awesome hip-twisting rockabilly of the Tombstone Brewlers and a snotty psychopunk rendition from Photon Torpedoes, *DYB* also includes psycho surf from Phantom Creeps (Noodoo Spell), plus zany sound clips from the flick and dead rockabilly leg-end/poultry enthusiast Hasi Adkins. If you're hankering for some perverted sex 'n' violence, or go gaga for giggling go-go ghouls, the brow doesn't get much lower than this. I swear, with the right set of ears, you can actually hear the boobies bouncing! **TD *******

Soundtrack

transcends the images it's married to. Opening Credits, a song clearly indebted to Goblin (at its most Argento), gives way to a brooding synthscape that soon becomes ominous before tracks like (heh heh) Grim Reaper Dildo add '80s guitar that unfortunately wouldn't sound out of place in an episode of *Miami Vice*. Gorritz then explores some Nine Inch Nails territory, whips up some effective electro effects tracks, tosses off some average-sounding sustained guitar murk, and bangs out a few standard high-energy pieces like Crazy Psycho Porno Where. The final track and only one by The Dog Rockets, limply drags its early-'90s indie rock riffs and lame lyrics about a cyber girl around for four-and-a-half minutes — but if you hit eject before then, it's a highly listenable massacre. Seminal? Well... yes and no. **DA *****1/2**

hours and imitators. Not for city slickers or the faint of heart. **AL *******



PLEDGE YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO SATAN!

Various

Necro-Tone Records

Highly recommended surf, rock and psychobilly from Necro-Tone Records, *PIATS* features Audio Drome all-stars The Ghastly Ones, Death Riders and Gein and the Graverobbers, along with the ghostly garage of Memphis Motorbans (Corpus Grinding Baby), spooky surf of Demon Seeds and the best Zombina and the Skeletones song we've heard to date (Zombie Hop). Also

included: The dead west rumble of Gore-Gore (ex-Deadbolt), decent filler from Headless Hearsen, and Eerie Von sounding a lot like Syd Barrett on the aptly-named Bone Drome. Here in the Drome we already pledge allegiance to Satan, this one's simply sweet reaffirmation. **TD *****1/2**



ZOMBIE GHOST TRAIN

Glad Rags and Body Bags

Havtrall 6 Records

Three slicked-up, monster-coiffed psycho-spectres playing super-catchy rockabilly riffs and sly surf

Psychobilly



SLAUGHTER DISC

Peter J. Gorritz and The Dog Rockets

Steel Web Studios

The soundtrack for the lo-fi hardcore gore-porn *Slaughter Disc* does exactly what it should: add a little drama to the film's repetitive K-Y 'n' karo set pieces. In fact, on its own, the mostly instrumental album easily

Soundtrack

HAYRIDE TO HELL

...And Back
Psychobilly US

From its beginning to its bloody end *Hayride to Hell's* long overdue follow-up to their 1997 debut pummels and pounds with non-stop bass-shredding, drum-banging, moonshine-swillin' madness. Loaded with themes of horror, murder, and the occult, *Hayride* is pure backwoods murderbilly, borrowing influences from European masters like Demented Are Go and Necromantix, then deep-lying them in blood and hellfire. The attention to solid production values and musicianship makes ... *And Back* a welcome addition to a subgenre loaded with ama-

Psychobilly



ENNIO MORRICONE

Crime and Dissonance

Itchac

Former Faith No More frontman Mike Patton makes no secret of his Euro-trash obsessions (check out his slicky *Fantomas* project for proof). How appropriate then, that Patton ventures into the vaults to pay homage to the undisputed king of the Euro soundtrack sound, Ennio Morricone. Patton produces *Crime and Dissonance*, an amazing new double-disc collection (compiled by Allan Bishop) of some of Morricone's most horrific, experimental and atmospheric tracks. Funky cues from *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, lullaby from *Hell Strains from Bird With the Crystal Plumage* and screeching sounds from *The AntChrist* are just a few of the tracks featured in this essential collection. A must-have for hardcore Euro-horror buffs and music aficionados with decadent tastes. **CA *******





RUE MORQUE NOW PLAYING ON RADIO

HALLOWMAS

The Road to Halloween's Eve
Corvus Records

A darker, meaner Halloween than heard on the Liverpool (Ohio) govt's awesome debut *October Burning*, *The Road to Halloween's Eve* is a witches' brew of flaming drumsicks, powerhouse licks and singer Boris Randall's signature decomposing-ghost-of-Presley vocals. The seven quick cuts contain nods to Peter Cushing's *Twins of Evil*, wiccan revenge (*Hanging Girl*) and intergalactic rage (*Planet X*). Simply put, the album should've been longer and the production feels rushed, but still Randall could croon the knickers off a nun and out-growl a grizzly in the same sweet breath. There aren't many doing classic horror punk any prouder these days, so if ya didn't know, *The Road to Halloween's Eve* leads directly through Ohio. (hallowmascript.com) **TD** 3.5/5 1/2

Punk



choruses, gritty guitars and barely audible synthesizer, American Werewolves pack more swinging hooks than a Texas meat locker. The 'Wolves drop notes like bad acid with classics-in-the-making *Dead Alive* (The Dead Have Eyes) and *Scream A Little Scream*, and lead growler Trevor Moment proves he can hit those sweet notes if he really wants to (on the croony intro to *For Your Blood*). The otherwise shouty vocals might not be everyone's cup of tea, but for old-school ghouls who take passion over perfection, 1968 is looking like the hardcore pick of '06. **TD** 3.5/5 1/2



SEVERE TORTURE Fall of the Despoised

Envyre

These Scandinavian death-metal turfs wonder why they're compared to Cannibal Corpse. Let's see... could it be the grotesque murder scene artwork? The obligatory smoked-50-packs-of-Marlboro vocals? Or maybe it's the groundbreaking slaughter lyrics that really make you think on tracks such as *Consuming The Dying*, *Sewn Off* or *Endless Trail Of Cadavers*. The answer is, it doesn't matter, because *Fall of the Despoised* rocks, and has more to offer than their Tampa-cum-Buffalo crustball inspirers have regurgitated in years. Blending the timeless classic guttural grunts with throat-tearing shrieks nestled amongst hyper-riffing and more low-end humming than a Ron Jeremy flick, *Fall of the Despoised* is unequalled in its sonic wrath. **KC** 3.5/5

Metal



IMPALER

Habeus Corpus

Root of All Evil Records

Impaler has been lurking within these pages ever since I can remember and it's not hard to see why. They play death metal that doesn't suck, don't take themselves too seriously and seem to improve and evolve just enough with each album to keep the shock thing rocking. *Habeus Corpus* kicks off with thick metal licks and brain-draining feedback on *Follow Me*, which work from a dirty Stooges lick and Bill's phlegm-coated growl beckoning "follow me." The headbanging bloodbath slides in some industrial (*Supernatural Superstar*), offers some ethereal spookshow rock (*Hitbox Ghost*), drags you by the hair to a drive-in disaster (*Monster Island*) and even includes a thorough ass-kicking of *The Dead Boy's Somic Reducer*. Also available: *Impaler - 20 Years Undead* DVD which traces the band over two decades of jack-o'-lanterns, flash pods and precariously placed strobe lights. If you like your death metal ground up into little punky bits and crammed down your throat by a scary long-haired morician, dial 1 for Impaler.

TD CD 3.5/5 DVD 3.5/5



AUDIO DROME

songs, *Zombie Ghost Train* infect a harmony that steamrolls on *Glad Rags and Body Bags* - produced by Peter Gage (The Meteors, Demerited Are Go and Nekromantik). Taking cues from The Cramps and Ghoultown, ZGT stir it up with voodoo vibes on cool cuts like *Deadcat Rumble* and *Nighttime Crawling*. Plus, the platter-headed dork in you should dig the nutty cover of Devo's *Girl U Want*. I'm aboard, hell I'm the freakin' *Zombie Ghost Train* conductor. Toooot! **TD** 3.5/5

son between yelps on *Portland Death Rock Vol. 1*. They blend the vague trappings of monsters and gypsies with tenuous titles such as *Revolutionary Theories On The Geometry Of Heartbreak* (scared yet?). But for a band that promises to "make you laugh until you pee a little but also frighten the shit right out of you", *Portland Death Rock's* messy, cut-'n'-paste collection of riffs and growls is a constipated cacophony that doesn't amount to a hill of bees. (coveredinbees.net) **TD** 3



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Punk



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SONGS FOR DEAD MEN

BY DAWN DALER

If horror has a home, New Orleans just might be it. Built on darkness, voodoo and, now, devastation, this sinful Southern city has birthed many gothic-tinged creations, including Rock City Morgue, the latest project by former White Zombie bassist Sean Yseult. The Big Easy-based foursome — which includes Rik Slave on vocals, Johnny Brashear on guitar and Keith Hajar on drums — create swampy, haunted, piano-driven rock jangles fit for a fiendish funeral. As Yseult tells *Ave Morgue*, the band never would have come together, or sound like it does, without the city and its eerie charms.

"Our band is heavily influenced by New Orleans," she says. "It's very just Gothic, beautiful and creepy: there's this thick fog and it's always humid, so every day feels like a horror movie. When you're surrounded by crumbling graveyards, something is going to happen to you. Even before the hurricane, if it flooded too much, you might have a coffin wash up in your yard — I know people who have had that happen."

Yseult first fell in love with New Orleans while touring with White Zombie, which she founded with Rob Zombie after the two met at Parsons School of Design in New York. She soon found herself spending all her time off the road wandering the city's crooked alleys and decaying graveyards, so it was only natural that she would start a new project (in 2002) and take up roots there after parting ways with the now-defunct horror-rock group.

"I moved here because I've always been kind of obsessed with creepier things," she explains. "I'd go check out graveyards whenever I was traveling, and New Orleans definitely has the best ones: they're crumbling, they're decaying, they're beautiful. Here, they have to build the tombs above ground, but the people who aren't rich enough to build the whole tomb around their body have a dirt surface. After it rains, you can always find bones — leg bones, finger bones — just sitting on the surface. It inspires the music, but I think we're also here because of who we are."

All those dark, Southern charms find their way onto *Dead Man's Song*, the band's first full-length album from Nocturnal Records (following their self-released six-song EP *Some Ghosts*), which was produced by former White Zombie guitarist J. Yungler and Daniel Rey, who's known for his work with The Ramones. A Jekyll-and-Hyde combination of '70s-infused punk songs and tracks featuring creepy crooning and haunting piano, the album jumps from quiet, smoky slow burns (*Dead Man's Song*, *I Did It For You*) to chugging, distorted, Stoppes-inspired kickers (*Never Ending*, *Disconnected*). With their musical hands in a few different pies, the band has also shared the stage with the likes of The Buzzcocks, X, The

Pixies, Velvet Revolver, 45 Grave, and recently they completed a tour with The Misfits.

"To be honest, I had no idea if I was going to get pelted with things when I sat down at the piano, but The Misfits fans actually loved us," Yseult recalls. "I didn't think they would get into some of our songs in which I'm playing piano — it's almost Pentecostal and [singer] Rik Slave is crooning like a ghoul — but it went over really well."

For Yseult, making a baby grand piano growl with goth has never been a problem. She grew up in South Carolina (where as a child she collected animal skulls and pretended to cast spells), playing the piano and violin, and later picked up bass when she met her Zombie cohort. Unfortunately, much of Rock City Morgue's gear was ruined when Hurricane Katrina destroyed their rehearsal space, but the group has since rebuilt, and speaking on the first weekend of Mardi Gras, Yseult says New Orleans has cast a stronger spell on her than ever.

"There are less people here for Mardi Gras because not everybody's moved back yet, and it looks like Armageddon in a lot of places, but people are coming back every day, every week, every month and they want to hang out with their friends, swap stories and see bands. There is a strange vibe here right now."

To purchase *Dead Man's Song* and RCM merch, visit rockcitymorgue.com. ☼

ROCK CITY MORGUE



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HIGHEST RATING IS OUT OF THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



FRIDAY THE 13TH & A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET KILLER TRIVIA

Trivia Card Game
USAopoly

When this game showed up at the Rue Morgue office there was a bitter, bloody battle between the Freddy fanatics and the Jason-fites to see who would stalk away victorious. After much hacking and slashing, art director Gary Putlin, who insisted on donning his plastic Jason hockey mask and Freddy razor-glove the entire game, came out on top of a pile of broken, bloodied bodies. Packaged in a sturdy oversized tin box, the game contains over 1000 questions from all eighteen of the Freddy and Jason movies, a blood-red playing die with headless bodies instead of numbers, and even a score pad in the shape of a corpse. Each set of cards is divided into a Nightmare selection, a Friday selection and a twenty-card Freddy Vs. Jason set. Each card has five questions of increasing difficulty and includes true/false questions like, "Wes Craven's *New Nightmare* had the longest running time of any of the *Nightmare* movies" (true), multiple choice questions like "When was Jason born?" (June 13, 1948) and Coroner's Report cards where players must look at the photo and description of a victim of one of the killers and correctly describe the manner in which they died. First player with 50 points wins but be warned; this is a dihard game for dihard fans of the franchises and will definitely leave a lot of players in the dust. Welcome to prime time, bitch!



MONSTER MAD LIBS

Pen and Paper Word Game
Bryce-Stern Studio

Is it possible that *The Blob* was actually a film about a huge, pulsation pink lump of macaroni and cheese that wants to become the best trans-vestite mayor of the city of Slapdowntown? Or just Dyla was about a huge horny St. Bernard dog that belonged to an astronaut who worked in a porn shop? Well, anything's possible when you're playing *Monster Mad Libs*. In this pen-and-paper game, players are given horror-based scenarios with a lot of blanks that must be filled

in with nouns, adjectives, parts of the body, silly names or whatever else is dictated. With often hilarious and results, the games are great time-wasters, and I'm positive Hollywood execs must be using them to conjure up movie ideas. Seriously, you can't tell me *Snakes on a Plane* isn't a *Mad Libs* creation.



ZOMBIES! 5: SCHOOL'S OUT FOREVER!

Board Game Expansion Pack
Twilight Creations

Zombiest! 4: The End was supposed to be the last chapter in the *Zombiest!* franchise but we all knew that it's hard to keep a good zombie down. Thankfully, Twilight Creations has once again reanimated the dead for another battle, this time on the carnage-filled campus of Twilight University. The box comes packed with sixteen new lies and 32 event cards (with exceptional art by artist Dave Atkins, featuring everything from preppy cheerleaders leaping over dead corpses to undead babies in bras having pillow fights). A great play by itself or with other *Zombiest!* titles, first one who kills 25 shamblers or makes it to the hospital is the winner. And while you're at it, take Mr. Cooper's advice and blow the place to pieces.

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doses of Vin Mariani and that a drug could become the axis upon which his allegory turned – an arcane medicinal potion that unleashed the brutal, evil side of human nature. But his ugly twin had yet to be named.

Enter Thomas Hardy. During the summer of 1885, Stevenson spent a brief holiday in Dorchester, where his old friend Hardy, a leading member of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, took him for a tour of the County Museum. There, Stevenson discovered a book called *The Civil Division of the County of Dorset*, which listed the names of two long-dead Justices of the Peace: Thomas Hyde (an entrepreneur) and Joseph Jekyll (a barrister). They were, of course, reincarnated by Stevenson's imagination as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Prolific but poor, Stevenson needed a bestseller. When *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was published in 1886 it seemed destined for obscurity until a rave review in *The Times* transformed the allegorical novella into a success, which brought Stevenson the reversal of fortune he craved. Within a few months the short novel sold roughly one million copies on both sides of the Atlantic and introduced a new phrase into the English language that expressed the duality of human nature and the potential for evil that slumbers in the arcane recesses of the psyche: "Jekyll and Hyde."

After Stevenson's death in 1894, the advent of motion pictures gave new impetus to the legend beginning with John S. Robertson's powerful 1920 silent film starring John Barrymore as Jekyll/Hyde (arguably one of the creepiest and best performances of the character ever filmed). Playing the character twelve years later, Fredric March became the first and only male actor to win an Oscar for a horror role. His interpretation was then followed by Spencer Tracy's portrayal in MGM's 1941 film, and so on. Most recently, even cartoonish versions of Mr. Hyde have made cameo appearances in films such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Van Helsing*.

More than a century after its publication, the cocaine-inspired *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* novella now stands as a landmark in horror fiction and an archetype for the dark self we revile in others and deny lying within ourselves. Stevenson's tale steadfastly holds a mirror that reflects an uncomfortable image of humanity we seldom wish to gaze upon – a metaphor that costs a pill of truth that is otherwise too bitter to swallow.

Marc Alexander

The unassuming house named Skerryvore in the sedate coastal village of Westbourne in southern England offers no hint of the dark origins of the horror masterpiece that was penned there. Bombed in 1938 and maintained as a memorial park since 1957, Skerryvore was once home to Robert Louis Stevenson. Ailing, emotionally troubled and financially strapped, the Scottish lawyer-turned-author wrote *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as his illness took a strange turn. During his youth in Edinburgh, Stevenson contracted bronchiectasis, a (now rare) lung disorder that destroys the bronchial tubes' self-cleaning system, resulting in chronic infections and coughing up blood. Stevenson's doctor suggested that the sea air of southern England might alleviate his suffering, so in April 1885 Stevenson and his American wife Fanny moved to Westbourne and rented Skerryvore.

The area had a small but thriving literary community with strong links to dark fiction. Although Stevenson had not attained commercial success, his reputation as a writer preceded him and he was warmly welcomed by Sir Percy Shelley, the son of Mary Shelley. Shelley's wife, Lady Jane, was addicted to Vin Mariani (a potent wine heavily laced with cocaine), and befriended Stevenson as he laboured on a first draft of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Fanny, however, criticized the novella so harshly that Stevenson burned the manuscript and started anew.

Burdened by his illness, Stevenson sought relief in the chemical comforts of coca wine, and although the drug relieved his pain, it triggered episodes of primordial rage. After his violent outbursts, Stevenson would be overcome with guilt, and he soon realized that his episodes were directly related to heavy



Robert Louis Stevenson's house before it was bombed in WWII.

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